

A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY-ORIENTED CHURCHES

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To my wife Karen,  
my sons Forrest and Tommy,  
and my daughter Laura,  
for encouraging and supporting me  
in this adventure we've taken together

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## **ABSTRACT**

This work focuses on multi-generational churches whose vision is to reach a community associated with a college or university campus and not just students. Past and present leaders at these churches were interviewed regarding the vision and history of their churches. The thesis first reviews the theological foundations for university-oriented church ministry and also reviews the relevant literature. It then reports on these interviews, highlighting the decisions and actions of these churches that caused them to become either more or less university-oriented. Based on these data, this thesis highlights the significance of both the original and the current visions in a church. It explains central elements of how a church might effectively live out the vision of reaching a university community with the Gospel, both moving toward that community in multiple dimensions and engaging that community with the Gospel.

## CHAPTER 1:

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

If the younger generation have never been told what the Christians say and never heard any arguments in defence of it, then their agnosticism or indifference is fully explained.... And having discovered that the cause of their ignorance is lack of instruction, we have also discovered the remedy.

— C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*

While religion was once an important part of higher education in America, the secular academic community has generally relegated it to a position of relative irrelevance. At one time, “Religion occupied a central but confined place in the colonial colleges,”<sup>1</sup> but today it is viewed by many in academia as “a private consumer product that some people seem to need.”<sup>2</sup> As such, it is “the single subject about which many intellectuals can feel free to be ignorant.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to this move of academia away from matters related to God, Jesus declared that the purpose of God was “to seek and to save what was lost.”<sup>4</sup> God in Christ pursued those who had wandered away from Him. Following this heart of God, it is the task of the Church to bring the Gospel to those who have wandered away from Him. So while higher education is distancing itself from the Church, the Church is called to pursue

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Thelen, *A History of American Higher Education*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>2</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 19:10 (NIV). All remaining Scripture citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.



the world of academia just as it also pursues other arenas of society, being “in” it while not being “of” it.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Purpose of this Study**

In light of this call for the Church to pursue this people group, the purpose of this study is to determine what decisions or events have served to make university-oriented churches either more or less university-oriented. The hope is that other churches seeking to reach this community could learn from the experiences, both good and bad, that made these churches either more or less effective in this vision.

### **A University-Oriented Church**

In order to learn what decisions or events made churches either more or less of a university-oriented church, it is necessary to be clear about what a university-oriented church is. For the purposes of this study, Dolson’s definition will serve as the starting point: A university church is “a multi-generational congregation that is located close to a major college or university and is prepared to engage that community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

For Dolson, “multi-generational congregation” is essential for the definition because it distinguishes a university church from a student-oriented church, that is, a church “where the average age of an attender is around twenty-five years and the demographic make up of the congregation largely represents one generation.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this definition of a university-oriented church describes a church

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<sup>5</sup> See John 17:15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Dolson. “The Challenges of Preaching to the University Church.” (DMin Thesis, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Dolson, “The Challenges of Preaching.” 3.

characterized by this definition as a whole church rather than only particular ministries in it. That is, these qualities would apply to a greater or lesser degree to programming such as the worship service, fellowship, and outreach, not just to its college student ministry.

For this study, this definition is strengthened in two ways. First, “is close to” is changed to “chooses to be close to.” That is, a university-oriented church is intentional about reducing its distance from the university. Its association with that community is more than accidental and more than a mere historical decision. Second, “is prepared to engage” is strengthened to “actively engages.” That is, the university-oriented church is not only ready to bring the Gospel into the university community; it is actively doing so. Accordingly, the working definition is: A university-oriented church is a multi-generational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In identifying churches that fit this definition, clarity is needed for the phrases “chooses to be close to” and “actively engages that community with the Gospel.” For this study, “chooses to be close to” the university means that the church intentionally reduces the distance between the church and the university community in multiple dimensions, including physical closeness, social closeness, cultural closeness, and spiritual closeness. Following are specific actions that university-oriented churches might be expected to take in each of these dimensions:

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Examples of Specific Actions</b>
Physical closeness	When there is an option, the church chooses to locate church activities (or even its building) geographically closer to the university community.
	People of the church, including leadership, choose to do things within and connected to the community (e.g., sports and cultural events).
	Church activities are scheduled in a way that is compatible with the university schedule (e.g., major business meetings are not scheduled during spring break or major sporting events).
Social closeness	Marketing and invitations are specifically directed toward people in the university community.
	Church communication is enacted in media, format, and style compatible with the normal communication in that community.
	Assumptions about people (e.g., political affiliations) are compatible with the people in that community.
	People from that community are welcomed as they are (e.g., attire).
	When possible and appropriate, the church engages in joint activities with the university community (e.g., lecture series).
Cultural closeness	Patterns of interaction (e.g., decision making) within the church are chosen to be compatible with the patterns of interaction within that community.
	The church highlights the overlap of values between the church and that community (e.g., learning).
Spiritual closeness	The church loves and identifies with people in that community rather than judging them or viewing them as outsiders.
	The church prays for the people in that community.
	The church provides spiritual care for people in that community.

**Table 1: Dimensions of "Closeness"**

Cultural closeness is one of the less obvious parts of this definition yet one that is expected to be very significant. People and organizations base their interactions, decision making, and daily activities on various core values. These core values are a part of their culture. Of course no single value would completely describe any community, yet inevitably certain values predominate. Core values that guide interactions among people in a group might include values such as authority, law, pragmatism, personal appeal and connection, appearance, serendipity, gut reaction, reputation, tradition, critical thinking and dialogue, and spiritual sensitivity. For example, when leadership in a group tries to convince its people to take a certain action, or when a group of people tries to come to a decision or conclusion about something, they will draw on various strategies from values

such as these. It is expected that the university culture is one that puts relatively greater value on critical thinking and dialogue. For example, when compared to many other cultures, it would be more likely to put greater emphasis on gathering data, analyzing situations, considering multiple perspectives, engaging in open dialogue, and following the path that is deemed to be the most reasonable by the group. It is skeptical of actions that feel like a marketing campaign or that appear to emphasize personality, emotion, tradition, or the formal authority of the person making the appeal. Of course no culture values only one thing, yet critical thinking is arguably more dominant in the academic community than it is in most other communities.

Accordingly, it is expected that a university-oriented church will give greater emphasis to critical thinking and dialogue in its ministries than would a church oriented toward a different culture. For example, the pastor's sermons and the congregation's decision making processes will exhibit an emphasis on reason, data, and open dialogue. In contrast to a university-oriented church, churches oriented toward other communities may place greater emphasis on values such as personal experience, tradition, emotion, or authority.

Returning to the definition, a university-oriented church is expected to seek to increase its closeness, including physical, social, cultural, and spiritual, to the university community it is seeking to reach, enacting values that are compatible with that environment where it can. Obviously specific values could vary tremendously based on the local university community as well as based on the character and values of the specific church. However it is done, a university-oriented church is a church that is seeking to reduce this distance between itself and the people of that community.

Given this effort to move closer to this community, a university-oriented church also “actively engages that community with the Gospel.” That is, the church intentionally uses its closeness to proclaim and enact the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is understandable and compelling within that community. While the church is open to people where they are, it also seeks to bring them closer to God through Christ, and it does so through loving proclamation of the Gospel.

Note that churches can easily do one of these two things without the other; perhaps the real challenge is in doing both of them at the same time. That is, churches can be “close to” the university yet fail to engage it with the Gospel. Some churches are located right next to a campus, have university activities in its buildings, host cultural events related to the university, and have lectures or workshops that match the emphases of the university community, and yet they fail to make clear the Gospel to that community. In contrast, other churches make clear the truth, engaging the community with the Gospel in some sense, yet doing so from a distance, perhaps by failing to care for or even know the people themselves, or by speaking from an attitude of superiority. A university-oriented church must both be university-oriented (i.e., moving closer to that community) and be the Church (i.e., engaging that community with the Gospel).

Obviously, this university-orientation is a continuum and its expression is dependent upon the culture of the university community to which the church is oriented. Not all university communities are the same, and even the name “university” expresses the reality that such a community is unified in some ways while being diverse in many others. This diversity relates, among other things, to one’s role in the university as well as the field of study with which one associates (if any). There are many differences between

and among undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, administration, and faculty. There are also many differences in the subculture within each area of discipline.

Furthermore, the blend in a congregation between those associated specifically with the university and those who are not will vary as well, often referred to as the “town-gown” tension. While this study focuses on churches whose predominant orientation is toward the university community, few churches could expect (or perhaps even want) to have only people specifically connected with this academic world involved. That being said, a university-oriented church intentionally has its “center of gravity” close to the university community.

In summary, the following definition of a university church will be used in this study: A university-oriented church is a multi-generational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **The Importance of this Study**

If the Church were to become effectively marginalized from the academic community, it would be hard to overstate the negative consequences. On the other hand, if the Church were to become more effective in proclaiming and enacting the Gospel in the university community, great good would be accomplished. Colleges and universities play a vital role in Western culture. The vast majority of leaders in our society spend years within this environment. For many young people, their initial days of adulthood are spent in an academic context that generally espouses relativism and freedom from restraints, and this exploration is generally engaged in a context without a significant voice for Truth. And what is more, American universities similarly influence many

leaders around the world as so many students and professionals come for training and preparation prior to returning to their own countries to take significant roles of influence. As stated by Charles Malik: "In view of the unique place and power of the university today I know of no more important question to ask than: What does Jesus Christ think of the university? All other questions, without exception, are relatively silly when this question looms in the mind."<sup>8</sup>

### **How It Will be Addressed**

The purpose of this study will be achieved by completing interviews with leaders from selected churches. The churches will be selected based upon their reputation of being or having been "university-oriented churches," including ministries both outside of and within the Michigan State University community.

While this study is being implemented, the author is actively engaged in ministry within a local church (a church that has determined that the university-oriented vision is not a fit for its ministry) while also serving in ministry in the MSU community in the role of a faculty member on campus. The hope is that this project will in some small way contribute to the increasing effectiveness of the body of Christ in reaching university communities with the Gospel, both locally and across the country.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Habib Malik. *A Christian Critique of the University*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 24.

## CHAPTER 2:

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The vision of a university-oriented church is a particular instantiation of the Church that God has sent into the world to bring salvation to all peoples. This chapter explores the heart of God for the lost world, which is the basis for His sending of the Son and for His sending of the Church into the world. Then it explores the Church as God's representative for bringing salvation, including its mission, its attitude, its message, and its actions.

#### **God Redeems a World in Darkness**

##### *God Makes a Good Creation: Genesis 1*

The story of our existence begins with the good world created by God as described in Genesis 1. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."<sup>1</sup>

When creation began, the earth was formless and void in darkness. Then God formed it and filled it. "Genesis 1 is a simple but majestic account of God's bringing order to the cosmos."<sup>2</sup> "The text charts a course of theological affirmation that results in a picture of an ordered, purposeful cosmos with God at the helm, masterfully guiding its course."<sup>3</sup> As God created the world, six times the text says that what He saw was good. The seventh statement is more emphatic: "And God saw everything that he had made,

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Walton *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 65.

<sup>3</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 65.



and behold, it was very good.”<sup>4</sup> Adam and Eve lived in rich fellowship with God and with each other, and at peace with the world around them.

### *The Good Creation Goes Bad: Genesis 3*

After describing this idyllic situation, Genesis goes on to tell “how one apparently minor act of disobedience upset everything and led to mankind’s expulsion from paradise.”<sup>5</sup> Because of their disobedience, God banished Adam and Eve from their perfect home, as recorded in Genesis 3:

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.<sup>6</sup>

Because Adam and Eve disobeyed, they were barred from enjoying what God had provided. The consequences were devastating. “In Israel, while there was undoubtedly a recognition of the inherent nature of sin, the biggest problem of the Fall was not concentrated in the change in human nature or the heart condition but in the loss of access to the presence of God and the reduced ability to participate in the blessing.”<sup>7</sup> Life without death and in fellowship with God, the life that was meant to be for Adam and Eve, had been replaced by life that would decay and end and would be lived at a distance from God. In fact, Genesis 5 records the generations of Adam as the men who die. Enoch

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>5</sup> G.J. Wenham. “Genesis,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, and G.J. Wenham (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press: 1994), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3:22-24.

<sup>7</sup> Walton, *Genesis*. 231.

alone is one who, because he walked with God, escaped this inevitable destination for all who live in this world.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, God did not abandon His creation or His people. “The Gardener has not abandoned his garden. The proof of love is the unwillingness to abandon the object of love even when love fails to achieve its desired end.”<sup>9</sup> This good world that God had made, this creation of order and light, had been put on a path to chaos and darkness because of man’s sin against God. Yet even in this trouble, God provided coverings for Adam and Eve, and He promised future action against the serpent, the source of the trouble.

### *The God of Love Provides Salvation: John 3*

The Bible is filled with expressions of God’s action to rescue His creation from the effects of sin. Certainly one of the most famous of these statements is John 3:16. It expresses the heart of God for a lost world, including His action on its behalf. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”<sup>10</sup>

Genesis describes God bringing light to a dark world. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”<sup>11</sup> Yet that world had become shrouded in darkness. John, who follows the pattern of Genesis for the start of his Gospel, describes the Word of God, namely Jesus of Nazareth, as the creator of the world who brings light back to that dark world. Yet the description is much more ominous than what is found in Genesis. “The

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 5:21.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce K. Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 92.

<sup>10</sup> John 3:16, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 1:3.

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”<sup>12</sup> Unlike Genesis, John declares the rejection by the darkness of the light of God. The Greek word translated overcome (κατέλαβεν) can be translated as “to win, to seize, to catch” as well as “to understand, to grasp.”<sup>13</sup> Both of these possibilities reveal the reality that the dark world was not receptive of the light sent to it. John further develops this idea in his prologue, describing how the Son of God came to his own people, yet they did not receive him.<sup>14</sup> Thankfully this rejection of the light would not be the final word, for some would receive Him, and some would truly come to see the Kingdom of God.

So when John tells us of God’s love for the world, it was this rebellious world of darkness that was the object of that love. And God loved it so much that He sent his Son, the Light, that He might provide eternal life to all who would believe. God’s action was to provide salvation, not judgment. The judgment was a given. In fact, it was something that in some sense had already occurred even though its effects were not yet fully known.<sup>15</sup>

These verses show that God’s love for the world was so great that He provided a means of salvation even at the cost of His Son. The dark world, even though it rejected God, was offered a path for salvation through belief in the Son alone; such is the love of God for His fallen creation.

### *This Salvation is Only through “Birth from Above”: John 3*

These famous verses of John that speak of God’s great love for the world come in the context of a description of the rejection of Jesus by His people. Sometimes the

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<sup>12</sup> John 1:5.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 519.

<sup>14</sup> John 1:11.

<sup>15</sup> John 3:18.

rejection was obvious, such as when people tried to stone him.<sup>16</sup> But sometimes, it actually did not look much like rejection. For example, after John describes a week of progressive belief in Jesus among the people of Galilee<sup>17</sup>, he goes on to describe Jesus' move to Jerusalem where He encountered something very different. Yet on the surface, the initial response still seemed very positive. "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."<sup>18</sup>

It seemed that the people had a good response to Jesus; they believed in His name, having seen his miracles. But then John gives a surprising assessment. "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."<sup>19</sup>

In spite of the positive appearances, Jesus was not impressed with the people's belief. Whether by His divine omniscience or by His insight into the lives of the people around him or by some combination of the two, He could see below the surface to the hearts of these people. Though they honored Him, there was something insufficient about that belief, something wrong at the heart.

John then provides a case study of this problem in the story of Nicodemus. John describes Nicodemus as one whom everyone would have thought would have been most likely to believe in Jesus. He was of the Pharisees and he was a ruler among the Jews. As such, he had chosen to dedicate himself to the study of God's Law and to the obedience of it, and people honored that dedication by recognizing him as a ruler for his people. And it was this Law that Jesus had come to fulfill. He was the object of the prophecies

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., John 8:59; 10:31.

<sup>17</sup> John 1:19-2:12.

<sup>18</sup> John 1:23.

<sup>19</sup> John 1:24-25.

that Nicodemus had certainly studied extensively. If any Jews should have been ready to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, certainly Nicodemus would have been among them.

In a subtle way, John alerts us to a surprising connection in Nicodemus when he introduces him as “a man of the Pharisees” instead of just introducing him as “a Pharisee.” It seems that John wants to draw a connection with the previous verses in which Jesus did not trust the people’s statements of belief because He knew what is inside “a man.”

Consistent with this pattern, Nicodemus declared to Jesus his belief in Jesus as being a teacher from God because of the signs He performed.<sup>20</sup> Yet as with the people whom Jesus didn’t believe, Jesus confronted Nicodemus as one who could not know all that he claimed to know about Jesus because he had not been born again (or better, born from above<sup>21</sup>).

Through the rest of this passage, Jesus explained that only through birth in the Spirit can one see and enter the Kingdom of God and thus enter into eternal life. Only that which is from above can bring the life that can participate in the Kingdom from above. And all of Nicodemus’s learning and prestige among the people were of no apparent advantage in this rebirth.

In fact, perhaps these apparent advantages were actually potential hindrances. John goes on to describe a conflict among followers of John the Baptist. John had become a popular leader and baptizer, yet that prominence was being lost to Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John 3:2.

<sup>21</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 189.

<sup>22</sup> John 3:26.

John's disciples didn't want John to lose the prominence he had gained. Perhaps tempting John as Satan tempted Jesus, they tried to get John to do something to prevent this loss of popularity and significance. In response, John the Baptist gave a critical assessment of the situation: "[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease."<sup>23</sup>

John was clear. He was ready to lose the honors he had, to lose them for the sake of Jesus. Those who have the apparent approval of God in the eyes of the people have to be willing to walk away from it in order to follow Jesus. Perhaps Nicodemus had to let go of the honor he received from people as "the teacher of Israel."<sup>24</sup> Salvation is a work of the Spirit; it is not a human achievement. As with the wind, it is not under human control and it is not for human glory.

In John 4, the Apostle goes on to describe someone at the opposite end of the social hierarchy, the Samaritan woman who was known for her sinful life. While she also asked questions of Jesus, John presents her as quickly moving to a far clearer understanding of Jesus' identity, and she immediately becomes a prominent evangelist for the Kingdom of God. She who had no apparent human advantages quickly received the light and life sent from God.

This section of John's Gospel declares that it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit. Not everything that looks like belief actually is such a birth, and not all that people honor actually brings people closer to such belief. Nicodemus, who had all that the world (and in particular, the religious and academic worlds) honored, is portrayed as struggling to come to terms with this message of salvation. In contrast, the Samaritan woman, one who lacked everything that the religious

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<sup>23</sup> John 3:30.

<sup>24</sup> John 3:10.

and academic worlds would think would lead to belief, is portrayed as someone who more quickly and fully embraces Jesus' true identity.

### *Implications for Today*

In the world today, these same truths apply. The world still is in need of the saving work of God, yet it prefers the darkness to the light. The only solution is a work of God, a birth through the Spirit from above. God's love continues to be great, and the life available through his Son is still freely available through faith in Him.

In addition, just as with Nicodemus and the people of Jerusalem, not all that looks like true belief is true belief, and not all that we expect would lead to true belief actually seems to help. As such, people who have a history of being associated with Christianity may not be any closer to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ than those who have been more distant from it. Accordingly, those in the secular university environment who have little or no connection with Christianity are invited to experience the rebirth through the Spirit just as those more closely associated with the Christian community.

On the other hand, all of the learning and prestige of the academic environment is not a particular advantage. In fact, these seeming assets may make it more difficult to come to faith, for coming to faith involves confessing that all of the things which people in this community often value so much (e.g., education, prestige, intellect) actually have no real value apart from the saving work of the Spirit. Stepping into the Light will reveal that any real good that people have is actually from God and not of them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See John 3:20-21.

## **God Uses Imperfect People to Bring Salvation**

As described above, God's saving work was accomplished through Jesus Christ and Him alone. By His death and resurrection, the one sacrifice that was required was offered once for all. No action of people can add anything to that work, for it alone is sufficient for all forever.

That being said, the question is this: how does this work of God occur in the world today? In many different ways, the Bible describes the work of the Spirit of God through the people of God as His means of bringing this salvation to all peoples.

### *God Uses Fallen People: Isaiah 2*

One of the key Old Testament passages proclaiming this role for the people of God is found in Isaiah 2. Isaiah was a prophet in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. His ministry was to proclaim God's word to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, beginning around the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The initial emphasis of his prophecy was one of warning to Judah that its ways were out of line with the ways of God. In fact, consider the first written words of the prophet:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;  
for the LORD has spoken:  
"Children have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me.  
The ox knows its owner,  
and the donkey its master's crib,  
but Israel does not know,  
my people do not understand."<sup>26</sup>

Through Isaiah, God declared that His people had less understanding than the ox and donkey. At least those animals knew who owned them and where to find their food.

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<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 1:2-3.



In contrast, the people of God had wandered from Him. And the rest of the first chapter describes the unthinkable reality of the rebellion of God's people against Him.

And yet, chapter 2 begins with a surprising vision of God for these rebellious people. God continues to have a plan for their role in making known His ways in all of the world. Rather than writing them off and starting over, God continues to hold out for them the hopeful future in which they play a prominent role in bringing His Good News to all peoples:

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.  
It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,  
and many peoples shall come, and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war anymore.  
O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the LORD.<sup>27</sup>

Isaiah describes how the nations will come to the people of God to learn God's ways. From God's people (metaphorically Jerusalem) His instruction and His word will flow to the nations even as the nations flow to Jerusalem to learn God's message. In spite

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<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 2:1-5.

of God's people's rebellion against Him (as seen in chapter 1), God continues to affirm the role that His people have in proclaiming the good news of Salvation through Him.

Accordingly, Isaiah turns to his countrymen in verse 5 and calls them also to walk in the light of the Lord. Just as the nations will one day come to walk in that light, God's people should also do it, beginning today. The Jews should live as those who know God.

The fulfillment of Isaiah's vision is one that seemingly comes in waves. Certainly Acts 2 presents an amazing picture of people who had come from all of the known world to know and obey the word of God.<sup>28</sup> In fact, when the people heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Peter, they were cut to the heart and begged to know what action is necessary in order to be saved.<sup>29</sup> And certainly more waves of fulfillment were yet to come.

#### *God Commissions Jesus' Followers: John 20*

This picture of the church, of the people of God through Jesus Christ, as His means for bringing the salvation won by the Son of God is made explicit by Jesus Himself in John 20:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (Acts 2:5-11).

<sup>29</sup> "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

<sup>30</sup> John 20:21-23.

In the power of the Spirit who brings rebirth to enter into the Kingdom of God, Jesus sent His followers with the same mission He had received from His Father. Of course, Jesus alone was sent to purchase salvation through His death and resurrection. Yet just as the Son was sent to bring salvation rather than judgment, so also Jesus sent His people to bring salvation by proclaiming the work of God to all the nations.

These passages show that God's vision for His people is that they should be the means by which the nations come to know the way of salvation, the way to pass out of condemnation and into the light. Even though God's people continue to be sinful, He sends them with a message. They come clothed in and proclaiming, not their own righteousness, but the righteousness given by God through belief in Jesus Christ.

### *Implications for Today*

Accordingly, the church today, sinful as it is, also is sent into the world, into the darkness, to shine the light of salvation of Jesus Christ. It continues to be true that the nations are to hear and respond to this Gospel, and they are to know this Gospel through the testimony of God's people.

### **God's People Love the World in Darkness**

One pattern that is common whenever a group of people gathers in distinction from some other group is the separation of "insiders" from "outsiders," often with a significant disdain felt by the insiders toward the outsiders. One particular place where this reality is found is in the university setting. As C.S. Lewis described it:

In any fairly large and talkative community such as a university there is always the danger that those who think alike should gravitate together into *coteries* where they will henceforth encounter opposition only in the emasculated form of rumour that the outsiders say thus and thus. The absent are easily refuted, complacent dogmatism thrives, and

differences of opinion are embittered by group hostility. Each group hears not the best, but the worst, that the other group can say.<sup>31</sup>

What C.S. Lewis described can certainly be found within religious circles as well. In fact, any group that holds its tenets as absolutely true and of absolute importance, it would seem, would easily fall into this approach. Why take the alternative groups' ideas seriously? And why not see their ideas as not only philosophically wrong but also the result of moral failure? It seems that the Church also could easily fall into this trap of looking down in judgment on those outside, just as the Pharisee looked down on the tax collector in Jesus parable.<sup>32</sup>

#### *God Loves the Lost World: Romans 9*

In Romans 9, Paul describes and enacts something quite different than this attitude. As many see it, the letter to the Roman church was largely influenced by the tension between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in Rome. From this perspective, the letter was "addressed to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, with an emphasis, if anything, on the latter group... Paul would then be writing to correct the Gentiles' indifference, even arrogance, toward the Jewish minority at the same time that he tries to show the Jews that they must not insist on the law as a normative factor for the church."<sup>33</sup> Paul, who identified himself as "an apostle to the Gentiles"<sup>34</sup> also identified himself as "an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> C.S. Lewis, "The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club," In *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 127.

<sup>32</sup> Luke 18:9-14.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Romans 11:13.

<sup>35</sup> Romans 11:1.

As such, he was an ideal mediator for this tension between these two groups of Christians.

Though this tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians is central to the letter, the letter is not only about this issue. “Paul’s focus is on the gospel and its meaning rather than on the Romans and their needs.”<sup>36</sup> “The bulk of Romans focuses on how God has acted in Christ to bring the *individual* sinner into a new relationship with himself (chaps. 1-4), to provide for that *individual*’s eternal life in glory (chaps. 5-8), and to transform the *individual*’s life on earth now (12:1-15:13).”[emphasis in original]<sup>37</sup> As such, one of the most dominant ideas of the letter is that God has provided righteousness and thus a life in glory by faith alone, apart from the Law, through Jesus Christ. In Paul’s words, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”<sup>38</sup>

To develop this idea, Paul uses a richly developed yet very simple outline. Table 2 shows a possible outline of this book, including some representative verses expressing Paul’s thoughts. In Paul’s letters, he generally follows the basic structure of theology followed by paraenesis. That is, he teaches what is true, then he teaches what that truth should look like in practice. The Epistle to the Romans also follows a very similar outline, yet with one significant difference. That is, chapters 9 through 11 (section 5 in the outline) come between his explanation of the Gospel of God and the implications for daily living. This interruption wrestles with this question: If God is true to His word, then

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<sup>36</sup> Moo, *Romans*. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Moo, *Romans*. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 1:16,17.

how is it that His chosen people of the Old Covenant are apparently no longer His chosen people?

1. Prologue	“For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (1:17)	1:1-17
2. God justly judges <u>all</u> people as sinners	“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (3:20)	1:18-3:20
3. God gives <u>righteousness by grace through faith alone</u> , not as a reward or pay	“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (3:21-22)	3:21-4:25
4. This righteousness <u>brings true hope</u>	“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.” (8:31-33)	5:1-8:39
5. God <u>did not abandon</u> His Old Testament people	“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’” (9:6-7)	9:1-11:36
6. The gift of righteousness should result in <u>righteous living</u>	“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (12:1-2)	12:1-15:13
7. Paul works to <u>spread this Gospel</u>	“For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,” (15:18-20)	15:14-16:27

Table 2: The Major Sections of Romans

As Paul launches into this section exploring the place of the Israelites in the Kingdom of God, note his description of these “outsiders,” these people who were not a part of the true people of God.

I am speaking the truth in Christ  
—I am not lying;  
my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—

that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.  
 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ  
 for the sake of my brothers,  
     my kinsmen according to the flesh.  
     They are Israelites,  
     and to them belong  
         the adoption,  
         the glory,  
         the covenants,  
         the giving of the law,  
         the worship,  
         and the promises.  
     To them belong the patriarchs,  
     and from their race, according to the flesh,  
         is the Christ  
             who is God over all,  
             blessed forever.

Amen.<sup>39</sup>

Note Paul's very strong language defending the truthfulness of these words in verse 1. Perhaps others had claimed that Paul had given up on the Israelites. Certainly some would have had reason to think so, given Paul's strong attacks against the Judaizers, those who claimed to be Christians and who at the same time were promoting adherence to the Jewish Law as a necessary part of being a true Christian. For example, consider these words of Paul: "But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!"<sup>40</sup>

Paul, as an apostle to the Gentiles, had vociferously argued that adherence to the Law was no longer required, and anyone who sought to convince Gentiles (or Jews) that they had to follow it in order to be accepted by God was right to anticipate a bold and direct response from Paul!

<sup>39</sup> Romans 9:1-5. Note that the text is laid out to reflect a possible structure of the content.

<sup>40</sup> Galatians 5:11-12.



Yet here in Romans 9, Paul emphatically expresses a great concern for his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” the Israelites. And the concern he has is more than a light concern. He describes “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.”

Paul goes on to say that he could wish that he himself would be accursed in order that his people might be saved. This statement is very startling. It seems that Paul must have had in mind the words of Moses in a very similar situation. While Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Law of God on behalf of his people, those people were flagrantly pursuing idols instead of God. After having been alerted by God to this rebellion, Moses came down the mountain to confront the people. Here is the record of that counter.

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.”<sup>34</sup> But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.<sup>41</sup>

Moses, like Paul, offered to be cut off from God if that might help his people be saved. Moses uses his own exclusion from God as a way to put pressure on God, whereas Paul explicitly suggests an exchange where Paul would accept the punishment while his people (the Israelites) go free. Yet God clearly accepts the heart and intent of Moses while also saying that such a substitution was not possible. No mere human can take the place of another before God as a payment for sin.

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<sup>41</sup> Exodus 32:30-35.



Accordingly, clearly Paul's offer was a hypothetical one. It would not be possible for him to swap salvation and judgment with another, let alone with a whole group of people. That would require a perfect sacrifice of greater value than one person, and it would seem clear that Paul knew that. Such a substitution would require the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God.<sup>42</sup> Yet Paul declared his readiness were such a substitution possible. Paul lived out the love that Jesus described: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."<sup>43</sup>

Paul says that his attitude was for both personal and theological reasons. Paul is deeply affected by the reality that so many of his own people were so far from God, these his "kinsmen according to the flesh." He was an Israelite as they were, and that connection mattered deeply to him. In this masterful phrase, however, he expresses both his connection with them as well as his distance from them. They are his kinsmen, his relatives in a human sense, and so he had a deep longing for them. Yet at the same time he was separated from them in terms of the kingdom of God. Paul was more deeply connected with the Gentile Christians through the Spirit of God than he was with his relatives in the flesh, and this distance from his own people hurt him deeply.

Paul was also affected deeply for theological reasons. These people had so many advantages in God, and the advantages were not merely superficial. Consider a few of the advantages that Paul describes.

- They are Israelites. Whereas Paul refers to his kinsmen as Jews fourteen times in Romans, here (and twelve other times in chapters 9-11) he

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<sup>42</sup> See Romans 5:6-8.

<sup>43</sup> John 15:12-13.

invokes the name that God had given Jacob. When God renamed Jacob as Israel, He claimed Jacob as His own. It was God's blessing on a man who had been a schemer, a blessing received by the grace of God upon the man who had wrestled with God.<sup>44</sup> By invoking this name, Paul here says that his people are the people who had been chosen by God based upon God's grace.

- They have the adoption. This is a surprising word for Paul to use, since it was a word he had just used to describe the salvation of God's people of the New Covenant.<sup>45</sup> It was not an Old Covenant word and seemingly not an obvious idea for that ancient context (as Moo says, "the word is not used in the OT or in Judaism"<sup>46</sup>). It seems that Paul is highlighting the idea of God choosing a people as His own. In the Old Covenant, God had chosen a people, not that every one of them would be saved, but that they would be His people to accomplish His work in the world. Paul here says that his people according to the flesh had been chosen as God's unique instruments for His purpose.

Paul similarly argues that theirs is the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the promises, and the patriarchs. Each of these assets is real and significant, and they heighten for Paul the sense of loss when these people fail to receive the righteousness of God by faith.

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<sup>44</sup> See Genesis 32:22-32.

<sup>45</sup> Romans 8:15.

<sup>46</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 562.

One last asset of these people that Paul describes is that the Messiah is “from their race according to the flesh.”<sup>47</sup> Paul here uses the same phrase he used earlier to express his own closeness to and distance from these people, and here he uses it to describe the relationship between these people and God. “From” them is the Messiah. They have the privilege of being the people who were the source of God’s salvation for all nations. And yet, while the Messiah was from them by the flesh, many of them were not a part of the people whom this Messiah had purchased for God. Tragically, they were part of the means of God providing this salvation, yet most of them did not experience this salvation.

Accordingly, for both personal and theological reasons, Paul has great anguish that so few Jews were coming to salvation, a salvation that was available only through faith in the Christ who was of the Jews. Yet Paul’s attitude was not one of judgment or disdain; it was one of compassion as well as grief over their loss. Sadly, many people claiming the name of Christ have often expressed a very different attitude about those outside of Christ, those seen as their enemies and the enemies of Christ. This attitude has been demonstrated toward the Jews as those who handed Jesus over for crucifixion, as well as toward the Romans who crucified him, as well as toward countless other groups who have opposed the ways of God or God’s people.

Unlike these judgments made by many who claim His name, Jesus Himself expressed this heart that Paul describes here. One dramatic scene is recorded by Luke as he describes the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem where He knew He would be handed over to be killed by His own people. When He finally got to the place where He could see the city, Jesus is overwhelmed with compassion for these same people who caused Paul’s grief as well.

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<sup>47</sup> Romans 9:5.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."<sup>48</sup>

Rather than expressing disdain or judgment, Jesus weeps over them. Sadly they were so close to their salvation, and yet so far away. The love of God for a lost world is such that God sent His Son to die for it. The love of God "does not rejoice at wrongdoing."<sup>49</sup>

### *Implications for Today*

In the early part of Romans 9, Paul demonstrates and promotes compassion for those who are outside of Christ. So also the Church today should look to the lost world with love and compassion rather than disdain and judgment. Instead of finding satisfaction at their judgment, Christians should weep over the lost among those who are so close to the Gospel, and yet so far away.

While non-Christians in the United States do not have the advantages of the Jews that Paul described, yet the attitude of the American church toward them should be very similar. For those Christians who call the United States home, these fellow Americans are "our kinsmen according to the flesh." And they certainly do have many advantages, particularly the abundant access to the Gospel combined with the tremendous freedom to pursue it. Furthermore, compared to the experience of so many in the world and over

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<sup>48</sup> Luke 19:41-44.

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:6.

time, there is even a great deal of approval or at least tolerance by society in general of those who would name the name of Jesus as their own.

Yet, these people, while being so close to the Gospel, are so often so far away. This pattern can also be seen among those in the university communities in the United States as well. So many of these schools have a heritage of seeking the knowledge of God, many even with Christian roots. Theirs is a value for the pursuit of knowledge with great freedom. And yet, so often they have turned away from this pursuit of the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. Having so many advantages and being a part of the communities that have so many Christian churches, sadly so many have missed what could be theirs.

So with Paul, the American church should have great anguish over this loss. Rather than fearing the university community or judging them or abandoning them, churches throughout the country, and especially churches that are geographically close to the people connected with the academic community, should weep over them and do all that they can, giving themselves that these people might come to the knowledge of God through Christ by His grace.

### **God Declares Good News**

One of the mysteries of the people of God is how people enter into this status of being one of God's own. A common assumption is that the physical descendants of God's people become the bulk of the next generation of God's people. Paul directly addresses this assumption in Romans 9:

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the

children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.<sup>50</sup>

Accordingly, Paul directly denied that there was a necessary connection between physical ancestry and being one of God's people. Of course there may be, and certainly seems to be, a relationship of physical children of people of God also becoming part of His people, but that connection is based on environment and the response of the children as a result of that environment rather than genetics or some influence placed on those children apart from their participation in the process.

Another common assumption is that those people who are sufficiently righteous or holy or good are those who by their goodness become God's people. In Romans 10:6, Paul makes reference to a profound statement by Moses to the people of God as they were about to enter the Promised Land. Paul quotes just the phrase, "Do not say in your heart," a statement that would likely bring to mind, at least for Paul's Jewish readers, these words:

Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Romans 9:6-8.

<sup>51</sup> Deuteronomy 9:4-7.

Moses' words to the chosen people of God declared that His choice of them was not because of their righteousness. In fact, he says that they had been anything but a righteous people of God. They were known for their rebellion and stubbornness. Thus, people become God's people for reasons other than their being holy.

Still another assumption is that people are made right with God because they have hearts that desperately want to reach Him. Many reason that those who mean well, who do the best they can even if it is not the greatest, and who are living the best they know how even if they do not know a lot, should surely be acceptable to God. But again, Paul denies that sincerity, desire, and effort are means of becoming the people of God. "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."<sup>52</sup>

#### *God Sovereignly Enacts Salvation: Romans 9*

So if it is not by ancestry or by goodness or by desire, what is the means by which one becomes one of God's people? In Romans chapters 9 and 10, Paul describes two sides of the process, one that is God-centered, and one that is man-centered. It seems that these two descriptions are of the same transaction seen either from above (God-centered) or from below (man-centered).

The God-centered side is God's sovereign choice. In short: "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills."<sup>53</sup> As Paul has already stated, no one is deserving of justification.<sup>54</sup> And by definition, no one deserves mercy. Mercy

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<sup>52</sup> Romans 10:2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Romans 9:18.

<sup>54</sup> See Romans 3:20.

acts in spite of the negative consequences that are deserved. As Paul argues, God chose the people of Israel in spite of themselves. He did so because He wanted to show His glory and grace. Furthermore, in order to further this purpose, God chose to have compassion on some while He also chose to harden others. "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills."<sup>55</sup>

Of course a significant objection is that if God chooses the ones on whom He has mercy and the ones He hardens, how can He still be a just judge who releases the one and condemns the other? The answer is that none are deserving of mercy, and none deserve anything but judgment, so God's mercy does not violate justice. That is, no one gets worse than he deserves. Rather, God is generous as He chooses by His divine authority. As the potter, He can choose what to do with each lump of clay. That He gives release to anyone is a result of His kindness and generosity, and He has the freedom to choose where He expresses that mercy.

#### *Man Receives Salvation through Faith: Romans 9-10*

After describing this sovereign action of God from God's perspective, Paul goes on to describe the transaction of people becoming His own from a human perspective. The Jews and the Gentiles both played an active role in this difference between those who are saved and those who are not.

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Romans 9:18.

<sup>56</sup> Romans 9:30-32a.



The Jews tried to reach justification by doing the right things, that is, by “works.” The Gentiles who were justified pursued a different route, that is, the path of faith. They did not try to pursue the path of the Jews that was adherence to the Law of Moses. Rather, they put their hope in Jesus who was the “end” of that Law. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”<sup>57</sup>

Christ was the end of the Law in multiple senses. First, the Law, as a tutor or guide to Christ, was no longer necessary once Christ came. So in the temporal sense, once Christ fulfilled the Law, the Law was no longer necessary to point to Him. Second, the Law had as its purpose to point to Christ. The Law showed that no one could be justified on his or her own. One means by which Jesus was identified as the Son of God was that He alone perfectly fulfilled the Law, for the Law was a description of the character of God. In a sense, Christ is like the finish line of a race. The race ends with the finish line, both temporally and in purpose. The Jews who failed to entrust themselves to Christ were lost because they failed to adhere to that to which the Law pointed. The Gentiles, in contrast, put their faith in Christ and His righteousness, and thus they were saved, even though they did not seek after the Law that pointed to Christ. As Paul states, the only hope that anyone, Jew or Gentile, has for justification is to call out to God in faith. “For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Romans 10:4.

<sup>58</sup> Romans 10:11-13.

Those who are saved are those who call out for the mercy of God based on the means He has provided, namely, His Son Jesus Christ.

*The Proud Stumble over Jesus: Romans 9*

It is surprising, then, that Jesus is referred to as a stumbling stone. After stating that Israel failed to reach that to which the Law pointed, Paul raises the question as to why they failed to do so. “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’”<sup>59</sup>

In what sense might Jesus Christ have been a stumbling block? It seems that those who think that their own efforts at righteousness should be sufficient for them to be justified discover in Christ a righteousness that far exceeds their own. Christ, by His own righteousness, reveals the unrighteousness of people who may have thought they were good enough. Like clothing that can seem white until it is placed next to a brilliant whiteness, the righteousness of the Jews could have seemed sufficient until seen next to the righteousness of Christ. As such, the path they thought would serve as a means to justification was revealed to be insufficient by the One who alone could walk that path. It is no surprise, then, that they took offense at the One who revealed the insufficiency of their righteousness. And as long as they continued to try to take the path of human righteousness, they would continue to trip over the reality that their righteousness was no match for the required righteousness that Jesus displayed.

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<sup>59</sup> Romans 9:32-33.

### *Implications for Today*

What Paul described in the first century is still true today. Salvation is still a sovereign act of God to rescue those who do not deserve His mercy. And salvation is still acquired through faith alone, rather than by man's goodness or desire or zeal. And as such, it continues to be true that Jesus is a stumbling stone to those who are confident in their own goodness and who expect that they ought to be acceptable to God.

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."<sup>60</sup>

The message of Christianity is one that is offensive to the proud, to those who are confident in their own righteousness or goodness. It is no surprise, then, that Jesus was generally welcomed by sinners and outcasts while He was generally opposed by the religious elite. And it should not be a surprise that today also, those who are confident in themselves would be offended by the message of Christianity while those who are well aware of their own failings would find hope. The message of Christ is a message of hope only for those who realize their own moral failings. These are the people who know that they are not able to live up to their own moral standards, let alone the standards of God. They can see the stains in their clothing even before setting them beside the brilliant whiteness of perfection. These are the ones who are much more likely, it would seem, to be ready to call out to God once they hear that there is a gift of righteousness freely given by God. In contrast, the message of Christ is a stumbling block to those who are confident in themselves. They see themselves as more deserving of God's approval than

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<sup>60</sup> John 9:39-41.

others, and so if God offers the gift of righteousness freely to all who will call upon Him, they are offended by the apparent injustice of it.

Furthermore, it would not be surprising to discover a greater frequency of such self-righteousness among those who are successful in the world's eyes. And in the university community, clearly the farther up the hierarchy of university success people are (perhaps from undergraduates to graduates to junior faculty to distinguished faculty), it would not be surprising to discover a greater preponderance of such self-confidence who would find in Christ a stumbling block.

And yet, even in the New Testament we have record of the social outcasts rejecting Jesus (such as the "other" thief on the cross<sup>61</sup>) as well as social elites accepting Him (such as many of the authorities<sup>62</sup>). The bottom line is not one's ancestry, not one's apparent holiness, not one's sincerity, and not the world's opinion. It is whether one, in humility, calls upon the name of the Lord. "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"<sup>63</sup>

### **God's People Proclaim the Good News**

In review, God's good world turned against Him, rebelling against His ways, and thus the world brought death and judgment upon itself. Yet rather than abandoning this rebellious world, God moved toward it, sending His Son to be a sacrifice to purchase its salvation, a salvation available only through birth from above by the power of the Spirit of God rather than by the apparent advantages possessed by some in this world. The Church, then, is God's means for spreading this salvation to the nations, even with its

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<sup>61</sup> See Luke 23:39.

<sup>62</sup> See John 12:42.

<sup>63</sup> Romans 10:13.

own failings. As such, rather than looking down upon the people who are in need of the message of the Gospel, God's people should look upon them with great compassion as Paul looked upon his own "kinsmen according to the flesh." And God's people are to make clear that this salvation is not one that people can deserve by their own goodness. Rather, it is by faith alone in the sacrifice of Christ alone, a message that will prove to be a stumbling block for those who are proud.

### *People with a Message: Romans 10*

So what is the prescribed action of the people of God to fulfill their mission in the world of bringing the salvation offered by God to all nations? Paul gives his description in the following verses.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"<sup>64</sup>

His chain of thought is clear. Calling upon God is what is required for salvation. Yet this action of calling upon God is not merely reciting a magical phrase. It must be the expression of a heart that believes in God. And such belief in God requires an understanding of God that can only come by hearing the message of God. This belief has content, namely the message of the Gospel. It is not a mere sentiment or vague hope. Furthermore, Paul says that this message has to be communicated by someone who knows it and makes it known. Namely, someone must proclaim or preach it. And finally, in order for someone to proclaim it, that person must have been sent with that message.

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<sup>64</sup> Romans 10:14-15.

Paul has defined the necessary ends of this chain of bringing salvation: the human side of the act of salvation culminates when someone calls out to God to be saved, and this final action is the end of the chain of events that begins with the sending of a messenger. Jesus Christ is the message, and He sent the church with that message. So Paul quotes Isaiah in expressing the beauty of the feet that carry the messengers who carry that good news!

The action of the people of God, then, at its core, is the proclamation of a message that invites people to call upon God to be saved. The Bible uses many different metaphors for this action including the watchman in a tower protecting a city,<sup>65</sup> a farmer broadcasting seed in planting,<sup>66</sup> an ambassador carrying an invitation for reconciliation,<sup>67</sup> and messengers carrying invitations to a great feast.<sup>68</sup> In all of these expressions, the people of God are not merely to behave like God, as challenging and important as that is; they are to carry the message of God.

#### *Reactions are not Guaranteed: Romans 10*

Lest one become too confident in the results of this process, Paul goes on to point out that even when the message of God is faithfully proclaimed, there is no human certainty as to how people will respond. In particular, the Jews had heard the message they needed to hear, and they understood the message that needed to be understood, yet without good results.

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says,  
“Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”  
So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

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<sup>65</sup> Ezekiel 3:17.

<sup>66</sup> Mark 4:13-20.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>68</sup> Matthew 22:1-14.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for  
    “Their voice has gone out to all the earth,  
        and their words to the ends of the world.”  
But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,  
    “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;  
        with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”  
Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,  
    “I have been found by those who did not seek me;  
        I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”  
But of Israel he says,  
    “All day long I have held out my hands  
        to a disobedient and contrary people.”<sup>69</sup>

As Paul argues, the Jews had heard and understood. What was the problem? They did not respond with faith. Here it seems that the two sides of the action of salvation are blended once again. God says that, through a “foolish nation,” namely the Gentiles, He would make His own people jealous in the hope that this jealousy would cause them to turn and call upon Him and thus be saved. God was sovereignly drawing the Gentiles to Himself, softening their hearts, that one day the Jews would do so also.

As such, the Gentiles to whom Paul was writing had no place for pride. Using the analogy of branches on a olive tree as the people of God, Paul says that the native branches, the Jews, were broken off because they did not have faith, and the wild branches, the Gentiles, were grafted in because of their faith. And he recognizes that the Gentiles might be tempted to have pride because others were removed that they might be brought in. In Paul’s words:

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a

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<sup>69</sup> Romans 10:18-21.



wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.<sup>70</sup>

This passage is controversial with regard to the issue of whether one can lose one's salvation. While that is an important issue, it is not the focus of this analysis because it was not Paul's focus. Rather, it seems that the primary reading should be regarding the Jews and the Gentiles as groups of people. The Jews as a people were cut off as a people, not as individuals. Paul already argued that he was a Jew and he was not cut off.<sup>71</sup> Similarly not all Gentiles are the people of God. Rather, the predominant response of the Jews was not to have faith in Christ, and the majority of the Christians at the time of Paul's writing, and seemingly the majority of Paul's audience in Rome, were Gentiles. The majority people group of God's people had shifted from the Jews in the Old Covenant, to the Gentiles in the New Covenant. As Paul states:

<sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;

<sup>27</sup> “and this will be my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.”

<sup>28</sup> As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. <sup>29</sup> For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup> For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. <sup>32</sup> For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Romans 11:20-24.

<sup>71</sup> Romans 11:1.

<sup>72</sup> Romans 11:25-32.



There are many challenging aspects to this passage, and many have written very strongly for what this passage means about the future of “Israel” and the Church. This analysis will not seek to settle or even unpack these many issues. Rather, the focus is this: God, in His sovereign authority, is involved in expressing His mercy among disobedient people, drawing men to Himself that they might be saved. The proclamation of the Good News is a necessary part of the process by which people come to belief such that they call upon God and are saved. But even deeper still is the action of God to soften hearts and to show His mercy such that people are saved.

#### *Implications for Today*

In terms of ministry today, the Church is called to proclaim the message of salvation and to live in a manner worthy of that salvation. The response of people to this message and these deeds is in the hands of God and not the Church. Ultimately it is by the mercy of God that anyone responds and that there is a “birth from above.” The task of the church is to make known the message of God’s mercy, compellingly, clearly, and in a manner worthy of the glory of this message, such that people are able to comprehend it. The hope is that those who hear will call upon the Lord. And when they do, they and we can be confident that they will be saved.

#### **God’s People Demonstrate Unity in Diversity**

One of the consistent characteristics of the people of God as recorded in the New Testament is diversity. The Gospels describe a wide range of people seeking to be near and being welcomed by Jesus, including wealthy and influential women,<sup>73</sup> tax

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<sup>73</sup> Luke 8:1-3.

collectors,<sup>74</sup> prostitutes and “sinners,”<sup>75</sup> religious authorities,<sup>76</sup> families with small children,<sup>77</sup> and foreigners.<sup>78</sup> The book of Acts also describes the diversity of national origin,<sup>79</sup> language,<sup>80</sup> and ethnic background.<sup>81</sup> Paul’s letters also reveal the significant diversity of the church. His instructions include masters and slaves,<sup>82</sup> parents and children,<sup>83</sup> men and women,<sup>84</sup> Jews and Gentiles,<sup>85</sup> and those who were prominent and those who were lowly in the eyes of the world.<sup>86</sup> James also explicitly addresses the rich and the poor.<sup>87</sup>

In short, the assumption of the Bible is that God’s people would be a diverse group of people brought together into unity. This diversity brought challenges of course, but it was also a demonstration of the wisdom and grace of God.<sup>88</sup> Paul used the analogy of the human body to prove the strength and goodness that comes in diversity, for different parts serve different functions and thus give the body more than it would have were it only to consist of one type of part.<sup>89</sup>

### *Implications for Today*

While the Bible does not command diversity, it assumes that it will be there and it never suggests that such diversity should be reduced. Rather, the unity of Christian love

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<sup>74</sup> Matthew 9:10-13.

<sup>75</sup> Matthew 21:31-32 and Luke 15:1.

<sup>76</sup> John 12:42-43.

<sup>77</sup> Luke 18:15-17.

<sup>78</sup> John 4.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 2:9-11.

<sup>80</sup> Acts 6:1.

<sup>81</sup> Acts 14:11.

<sup>82</sup> Colossians 3:22-4:1.

<sup>83</sup> Colossians 3:20-21.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

<sup>85</sup> Ephesians 2:13-16.

<sup>86</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-27.

<sup>87</sup> James 1:9-11.

<sup>88</sup> Ephesians 4:1-7.

<sup>89</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-25.

in the midst of such diversity is honored and is presented as a mark of authenticity as God's people.<sup>90</sup> In the church today, we ought to encounter a similar unity in the context of diversity. This pattern would be especially true in university communities since universities are places where people gather from many backgrounds and perspectives, and thus diversity is often intensified. A church seeking to be a part of this community would likewise expect to exhibit a similar diversity, including the diversity of race, ethnicity, language, religion, economics, age, role in life, gifts, and passions.

One option for a church would be to identify a segment of this community and make that the target population, such as students, or people from a particular background, or people in a particular area of study. While such an approach has many strengths and has proven to be a productive path for ministry, the Church itself should be moving to embrace the diversity rather than to avoid it. Certainly having slaves and masters in the same body presented significant challenges in the early church, for example, and so it was a demonstration of the love of God, showing the Spirit's presence and power, when the inevitable conflicts were resolved in the love of Christ.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, as in the early church, the Church today should embrace the diversity of the community around it, demonstrating the love of God for all people.

### **God's People Go Out to the Lost World**

In Romans 15, Paul expresses his passion for proclaiming the Gospel where Christ is not yet worshiped. He also expresses his focus and his strategies.

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the

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<sup>90</sup> John 13:35.

<sup>91</sup> See Philemon 15-16.

Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see,  
and those who have never heard will understand.”<sup>92</sup>

Having completed the body of his letter to the Roman church, Paul wraps up this letter by returning to state his focus on the Gospel and his recognition of his own calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Everything he does focuses on the news of Jesus Christ, and this focus is for the purpose of bringing the Gentiles, the outsiders from the perspective of the Jews, to the obedience of faith.

In terms of his strategy, it includes both word and deed. His words were his proclamation, including his written testimony. His deeds were his actions that corroborated that message. And both his proclamation and his actions were a demonstration of the power of the Spirit. In Paul's case, this demonstrable power included miraculous “signs and wonders.” While there is disagreement over what the expectation should be for an expression of signs and wonders today, clearly at least it means a growing pattern of holy and productive actions of the church and its people in honor to God and for the good of people. Furthermore, clearly it involves transformed lives as people are born from above and live lives empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

All of this for Paul was to be done among those who have not yet named Christ as Lord, meaning that his goal was to serve among those who did not yet worship Christ. Paul's heart was the heart of an apostle, the heart of one who longed to take the Gospel to new places where few if any understood and accepted it. While he longed to be with the

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<sup>92</sup> Romans 15:18-21.

church in Rome, “that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you,”<sup>93</sup> he also had a strong pull to go elsewhere. Since he was convinced that they were able to function well without him,<sup>94</sup> he wanted to pursue his calling to take the Good News where churches had not yet been established.<sup>95</sup>

### *Implications for Today*

For the church today, certainly the same passion should be present. The church exists to fulfill God’s mission for it, that to the ends of the earth people would hear, understand, and submit to the Gospel of God. By word and by deed, the church should make known its primary message, namely the reality of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the good of all who would call upon Him.

Like Paul, clearly the church should have the passion of making this Gospel known where Christ is not yet worshiped. Certainly some churches will have a greater emphasis on this focus than others, yet to be like Christ, if it is truly enlivened by the Spirit, every church will have this passion. Just as not all of the New Testament apostles were “apostles to the Gentiles” as Paul was, so also today each church will have a different calling. Some are called to the university community just as some are called to urban communities or to rural communities and so on. It is up to each church to discern its call and then to pursue that call wholeheartedly.

The Spirit of Christ in the Church moves it to make known, through word and deed, the Gospel of Christ among those who have not yet named Him as Lord. May the

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<sup>93</sup> Romans 1:11.

<sup>94</sup> See Romans 15:14.

<sup>95</sup> See Romans 15:20.

Church embrace that calling, venturing to speak of nothing except of Christ and what He has done.

### **God's People Love God and the World**

So what are the deeds of the church? Paul spoke of both words and actions with the purpose of making known Christ. The summary of the Law as offered by Jesus is a great picture of the actions of the church.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."<sup>96</sup>

The church is called to love God with all of its heart, soul, mind, and strength. It would seem that each person and each group of people has a preferred arena for loving God. Some are more inclined to love God with the mind in their words and thoughts, than with the strength in their actions. The love that God's people enact toward Him is a complete love, encompassing all aspects of human existence. The same should be true of each church. The people of God should love Him from the core of who they are, including the emotions and will, the intellect, and the body. A university-oriented church will likewise love God with the intellect, that is, with the head, which is obviously a great strength for it to have, yet it must also love God with the heart and with the hands. A university-oriented church must love God with more than just the mind, although

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<sup>96</sup> Mark 12:28-31.

certainly not less than with a fully engaged intellect. It must “walk in a manner worthy of [its] calling.”<sup>97</sup>

The church is also called to love its neighbors as itself. This love must also reflect the whole of what it means to be human, loving those around it with the head, the heart, and the hands. And it must love those in need of the Gospel as well as those in need of basic necessities for life itself.<sup>98</sup> It must seek the good of those around it as those whom God loves and for whom God cares. This call to the integration of right belief and right action is a significant pattern for the prophets. For example, Micah expresses God’s requirements to a people who thought that religious actions and right beliefs alone would be sufficient.

“With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>99</sup>

The Church today also is to live in a manner worthy of God, seeking justice, kindness, and humility, meeting the needs of people around it, bringing good to both those close to God and those far off. And in the context of this manner of life, its priority will be to bring the message of the Good News of God to those who are not yet in obedience to this Gospel.

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<sup>97</sup> Ephesians 4:1.

<sup>98</sup> 1 John 3:16-18.

<sup>99</sup> Micah 6:8.

## God's Glorious Plan Is that He Uses Redeemed People

God's desired will is that all would be saved.<sup>100</sup> He sent His Son to bring salvation to those who were near and those who were far off. Surprisingly, He has chosen His people to be at the center of fulfilling this will. He invites people into the productivity of His Kingdom. In John 15, Jesus uses the metaphor of a productive vine for His Kingdom. A productive vine produces a good crop of grapes. Jesus is that vine, but He is not alone as that vine. He says that His followers also are a part of that vine if they abide in Him. As such, His followers also are to bear the fruit of His Kingdom.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.<sup>101</sup>

The Father delights to have His people be the means by which His will is accomplished. The Church today also is invited into bringing about the fruitfulness that God brings. There are many things in God that we do not understand, and there is so much to learn about the ways in which the Church is to live out this calling of God. And yet, at the core is the amazing goodness and grace of our God who invites us, sinful, foolish, and weak as we are, to be a means of His saving work in the world!

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
"For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?"  
"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.

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<sup>100</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

<sup>101</sup> John 15:5-8.



To him be glory forever.  
Amen.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Romans 11:33-36.

### **CHAPTER 3:**

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter surveys the literature related to university-oriented churches. The organizing idea for this survey is that there is a divide that exists between the world of the church and the world of the university, a divide that many have sought to overcome in various ways. This review explores the nature of this divide as well as approaches for bridging it. The type of bridge addressed by this study, that is, a university-oriented church, has received little particular attention in the literature though many publications have important implications for it.

Figure 1 shows possible answers to two different questions: “What is the focus of the organization?” and “What is the context of the organization?” The upper-right quadrant shows the church as (ideally) an organization that seeks primarily to understand better and to live more effectively within a natural and supernatural world, that is, a physical and spiritual world that is dominated by God, His role in the world, and His direction for human behavior. Furthermore, it carries out this pursuit in a context that expects, alongside the natural world, both the participation of God and the active appeal to God by those in the organization. In contrast, secular higher education in the lower-left quadrant primarily seeks to understand the natural world without reference to the supernatural, and it does so in a context that generally excludes an expectation of God’s participation while it seeks to minimize people’s appeal to Him. The other quadrants, though not a focus of this study, help to clarify the distinctions. The lower-right quadrant is the study of belief in the supernatural in a context that does not explicitly invite God to be present and that does not appeal for such presence. The upper-left quadrant represents

some expressions of Christian higher education in which there is a study primarily of the natural world in a context that explicitly includes appeal to God and an expectation of God's presence in the organization.

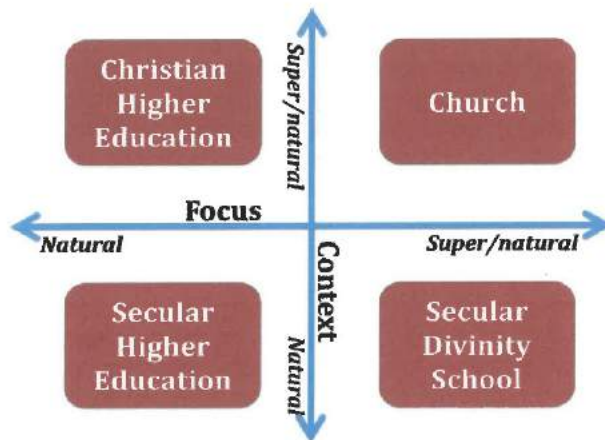


Figure 1: The Church and Higher Education

This project studies the relationship between the upper-right quadrant, that is, the Church, and the lower-left quadrant, that is, secular higher education. Given the fundamental differences between these two quadrants, it is not surprising that how they interrelate is and has been the source of significant debate. The positions range from those who believe that there should be only minimal or even no interaction between the domains to those who endorse various types of interaction. Exploring the nature of a healthy and rich interaction between the two types of organizations is central to this study.

Given this core issue, this literature review is organized around the following topics:

- The University and its Core Values

- Ideas and Spirituality in the Intersection between General Society and the Secular University
- Ideas and Spirituality in the Intersection between the Church and the Secular University
- Christian Faculty and the Secular University
- Campus Ministers and the Secular University
- The Church and the Secular University

### **The University and Its Core Values**

Chapter 2 explored a theological understanding of the church and its place in the world. This section explores the other domain, that of the secular university. What is clear from the literature is that there is no single, broadly accepted definition of a university. The vision for higher education differs across people at any age while it also differs across time. Within this complexity, however, there are some recurring themes.

#### *Pursuing Truth via Reason and Communication*

One of the most dominant recurring themes in the literature is that a university is a place where people are encouraged to seek truth via reason. Some take this pursuit as the single most important value, even the defining value, of the university. As described by Starr: “The pursuit of truth has been the *raison d’être* of the university since its beginnings at the end of the twelfth century.”<sup>1</sup> “A working definition of a university, then, is a community of persons associated with the rational pursuit of truth.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert H. Friedlander, *Never Trust a God Over 30: New Styles in Campus Ministry* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Friedlander, *Never Trust a God Over 30*, 32.

Along a similar vein, Morgan describes the university as the natural home for the scholar and as a place where the life of the scholar is promoted. As such, his description of the scholar becomes a description of the university. Scholars, according to Morgan, are driven by two forces: curiosity and the desire to communicate. Curiosity “is really nothing more or less than a desire for truth.”<sup>3</sup> And scholars are resistant to constraints on such curiosity. “You will find them suspicious of loyalty oaths, religious creeds, or affiliations with political parties. In particular they will try to preserve their university as a sanctuary within whose walls any question can be asked.”<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, according to Morgan, from the world’s perspective, “Curiosity is a dangerous quality.”<sup>5</sup> “The world does not much like curiosity. The world says that curiosity killed the cat. The world dismissed curiosity by calling it idle, or mere idle, curiosity—even though curious persons are seldom idle.”<sup>6</sup> “The world understands and respects utility and ... it does not understand much else.”<sup>7</sup> Because of this antagonism, scholars defend the university as “a place where the world’s hostility to curiosity can be defied.”<sup>8</sup>

The second driving force of the scholar, according to Morgan, is the desire to communicate what is learned. That is, it is the desire to teach. “A scholar is driven by a force as strong as his curiosity that compels him to tell the world the things he has

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13. <sup>3</sup> ES Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” *Saturday Review*, January 23, 1960,

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 13.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 13.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 13.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 13.

<sup>8</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 13.

learned. He cannot rest with learning something: he has to tell about it. Scholarship begins in curiosity, but it ends in communication.”<sup>9</sup>

In these tandem forces of curiosity and communication, scholars need and want resistance, not to curiosity and communication, but to the content of their learning and their teaching:

I said that curiosity is a dangerous quality. It is dangerous not only because of incidental effects like the atomic bomb but also because it is really nothing more or less than a desire for truth. ... The search for truth is, and always has been, a subversive activity. And scholars have learned that they cannot engage in it without an occasional fight.<sup>10</sup>

This fight is actually an important and valued part of the academic community.

The scholar does not merely need to tell; the scholar also needs to be challenged:

He needs to be tested, probed, and pushed around. He needs to be made to explain himself. Only when he has expressed himself, only when he has communicated his thoughts, can he be sure that he is thinking clearly. ... He needs people who will challenge him at every step, who will take nothing for granted.<sup>11</sup>

Malik similarly describes the pursuit of truth as the central value of the university, which he also sees as central to Western civilization. “More than by anything else, Western civilization is *defined* by total fearlessness of and openness to the truth. To the extent this civilization begins to harbor reservations about this fearlessness and this openness, it ceases to be itself, i.e., Western.” [emphasis in original]<sup>12</sup>

Lewis similarly describes this pursuit of the truth, and in particular, the troublesome truth, as central to what it means to be the university:

It is the same [in growing as a Christian] as in science. The phenomenon which is troublesome, which doesn't fit in with the current scientific theories,

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<sup>9</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 14.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 14.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, “What Every Yale Freshman Should Know,” 14.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Habib Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 19.

is the phenomenon which compels reconsideration and thus leads to new knowledge. Science progresses because scientists, instead of running away from such troublesome phenomena or hushing them up, are constantly seeking them out.<sup>13</sup>

Willimon describes the same value. “[Academics are] trained in our respective disciplines to find the facts, to uncover reality and to name it, to state what is as opposed to what is not.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Pursuit of Truth plus Goodness and Beauty*

Buttrick takes a broader view, arguing that historically the university focused not just on one core value but on the three great values of truth, goodness, and beauty. Recently these values were narrowed down, he argues, to focus specifically on “the mind-aspect of man’s response to total Reality—in short, truth.”<sup>15</sup> And it has now become narrowed down even further to an emphasis primarily on scientific truth. According to Buttrick, much has been lost in this narrower focus on just one part of one of these three values.

### *Learning Plus Moral Obligation and Social Responsibility*

From an even broader view, Jeffrey begins with similar values of academic freedom, learning, and teaching. He then adds the claim that intellectual work itself is not enough. The university is “...where intellectual freedom, essential to academic work, interacts with moral obligation and social responsibility.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 91.

<sup>14</sup> William H. Willimon and Thomas H. Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), x.

<sup>15</sup> George Arthur Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 4.

<sup>16</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey. “Faith, Fortitude, and the Future of Christian Intellectual Community” in Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 89.

### *Newman's Vision of the University as Character Formation*

Newman's classic *Idea of a University* defines and defends the vision of a liberal arts education in which the formation of key inner qualities of the students was central. He is more interested in literature than science, and the formation of character is more to be valued than preparing students for the technical requirements of their careers, something he calls "the mechanical arts." "The purpose of a university education is the achievement of a particular expansion of outlook, turn of mind, habit of thought, and capacity for social and civic interaction."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, he argues that technical learning without character development can actually be a harmful thing. That is, knowledge alone can be used to carry out horrific actions, a prime example that people point to after Newman's day being the Holocaust, and it is the intention of the university (at least it should be) to promote "good" application of that which it has come to know.

Part of this necessary growth of the individual includes an ability to interact effectively with those with whom they disagree. Pelikan describes this in his reexamination of Newman's seminal work. "What is needed is the skill and the art of holding views strongly and yet of respecting views that are diametrically opposed."<sup>18</sup>

Newman distinguishes information (the answer to the question "What?" which he describes as a list of facts), knowledge (the answer to the question "How?" which he describes as the inferences from the facts), and wisdom (the answer to the question "Why?" which he describes as the necessary step beyond knowledge).

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<sup>17</sup> John Henry Newman and Frank Miller Turner, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), xv.

<sup>18</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 55.



### *A Means for Upward Mobility*

According to Smith and Langslow, one of the great shifts in higher education has been the expansion of access to the academy to a far greater spectrum of society rather than just for the socially privileged and intellectually talented. With this change, Keohane<sup>19</sup> describes three broad types of schools:

- Brand name schools, that is, the elite institutions (a distinction that becomes important when one considers how many Christians there are in higher education)
- Mass producer schools, such as state universities
- Convenience schools, particularly vocational and professional schools whose primary attraction is their accessibility

For everyone, higher education has been seen as a means to a better life, but depending upon one's original position in society, this value has been viewed a bit differently. "In the United States..., a college degree has been the *sine qua non* for the maturation of young members of elite families and the most significant path to upward mobility for everyone else."<sup>20</sup>

### *In Danger of Losing these Strengths*

In describing the values of the university, many have also written of their concern for how some of the deep values of the university are in danger of being lost, or actually have been lost. Some of these critiques highlight what the authors see as a deviation from the core value of the pursuit of truth. For example, according to Weaver, significant changes have occurred in higher education with the growth of nominalist philosophy. In

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<sup>19</sup> Nannerl O. Keohane. "The American Campus: From Colonial Seminary to Global University" in David Cecil Smith and Anne Karin Langslow. *The Idea of a University* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Keohane, "The American Campus," 48.

particular, senses and experience have supplanted intellect as the primary mode of inquiry:

The practical result of nominalist philosophy is to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the senses.<sup>21</sup>

[It is] the shift from the truth of the intellect to the facts of experiences...<sup>22</sup>

Since the time of Bacon the world has been running away from, rather than toward, first principles, so that, on the verbal level, we see 'fact' substituted for 'truth,' and on the philosophic level, we witness attack upon abstract ideas and speculative inquiry.<sup>23</sup>

According to Lewis, the university all-too-readily abandons curiosity and intellectual integrity in favor of a more comfortable approach:

In any fairly large and talkative community such as a university there is always the danger that those who think alike should gravitate together into *coteries* where they will henceforth encounter opposition only in the emasculated form of rumour that the outsiders say thus and thus. The absent are easily refuted, complacent dogmatism thrives, and differences of opinion are embittered by group hostility. Each group hears not the best, but the worst, that the other group has to say.<sup>24</sup>

Malik expresses concern that a fear of the truth is inhibiting the pursuit of truth. According to Malik, such a fear was part of the weaknesses of Soviet universities of the past, and a similar fear has grown in the West, a fear that is inhibiting, in his view, the knowledge of Christianity. "This blunting, inhibiting virus has infected Western universities themselves with respect to the knowledge of Christianity. ... The original universal Greek curiosity is gradually becoming overwhelmed!"<sup>25</sup>

If that were not enough, Watson catalogs a litany of apparent problems with higher education today. "Almost everyone who reflects seriously on the American

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<sup>21</sup> Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Weaver, *Ideas*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Weaver, *Ideas*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 19.

university discerns monumental problems: thinkers who won't teach, teachers who won't think, students who won't learn, administrators who won't leave well enough alone."<sup>26</sup> He goes on to list other problems including political correctness, bureaucracy, and curricular incoherence.

Yet another concern about higher education is the rising cost of such an education, especially contrasted with the apparently limited economic benefit of at least some degrees. This issue is one of the central concerns expressed by those in the "Occupy" movement in late 2011. As reported in *Inside Higher Ed*, graduates have said, "I have \$50,000 in student loan debt and my B.A. is useless." "Graduated college: May 2010. Debt: \$35,000. Jobs in US: None." "I am 38 years old. It will take me almost 30 years to pay off my student loans."<sup>27</sup>

One advocate for the Occupy movement voiced this significant skepticism about higher education. "For the protesters, higher education is part of a system that many view as rigged against them."<sup>28</sup>

### *Summary*

Descriptions of the university, while very diverse, exhibit the recurring core value of the pursuit of truth through reason. Some writers also describe the historical emphasis on goodness, beauty, moral obligation, social responsibility, and character formation. Society has viewed the university as a means for upward mobility, being a context for forming one's character or a path opening doors for future study and employment. Some

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<sup>26</sup> Bradley C.S. Watson, "Introduction: The American University in Crisis" in Bradley C.S. Watson (ed.) *The Idea of the American University* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Libby A. Nelson, "Occupy Student Loans." *Inside Higher Ed*.  
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/11/15/occupy-protests-focusing-increasingly-student-debt>  
(accessed January 4, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Nelson, "Occupy Student Loans."

voices, however, warn that higher education in the United States (and elsewhere) is in danger of losing these strengths as it succumbs to uncertainty, ease, and fear, while others are critical from an economic perspective.

### **Ideas and Spirituality in the Intersection between General Society and the University**

When the focus is expanded beyond just higher education to include society in general, obviously the diversity encountered dramatically increases. And yet, some authors have argued that there is a deep connection between the values of the academic world and Western society at large.

#### *The University as the Most Profound Influence on Society*

According to Malik, there is no institution that has greater influence on Western society than the university:

This great Western institution, the university, dominates the world today more than any other institution: more than the church, more than the government, more than all other institutions.<sup>29</sup>

The universities, then, directly and indirectly, dominate the world; their influence is so pervasive and total that whatever problem afflicts them is bound to have far-reaching repercussions through the entire fabric of Western civilization.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Hope in Knowledge and Technology*

This deep influence is clearly seen, according to Knorr-Cetina, in Western society's deep and enduring belief that knowledge is powerful, and that greater knowledge will bring greater good. "There is a widespread consensus today that contemporary Western societies are in one sense or another ruled by knowledge and

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<sup>29</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 20.

expertise.”<sup>31</sup> “By many accounts, contemporary Western societies are becoming (or have already become) ‘knowledge societies.’”<sup>32</sup>

Knorr-Cetina goes on to claim that not all knowledge domains are equivalent. In fact, one stands out above the rest. “Epistemic cultures are cultures that create and warrant knowledge, and the premier knowledge institution throughout the world is, still, science.”<sup>33</sup>

In contrast, many people in society look at higher education with significant skepticism. According to Hatch,

Increasingly, many Americans have come to question this privileged status [of higher education]. Indictments of higher education are leveled from many quarters. Spiraling costs and renewed concern about the quality of undergraduate teaching have led to intense scrutiny of faculty and university administrators alike.<sup>34</sup>

Yet there is also a deep belief that increased knowledge, particularly that knowledge of the sciences that can yield new technologies, will bring tremendous good to most if not all challenges we encounter, challenges that range from global climate change to obesity, from terrorism to depression, from finding a spouse to raising better kids. In fact, Naisbitt claims that we have gone beyond a healthy belief in the good of such technology to something that he calls intoxication. “Softened by the comforts technology brings to our lives, fascinated by its gadgetry, reliant on its constant companionship,

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<sup>31</sup> Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, “Christian Thinking in a Time of Academic Turmoil” in Bob R. Agee, *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 88.

addicted to its steady delivery of entertainment, seduced by its promises, awed by its power and speed, Americans are intoxicated by technology.”<sup>35</sup>

#### *A Decreasing Concern about Ideas*

Naisbitt’s description of a deep belief in technology suggests that what people want is not so much knowledge itself, but convenience and ease that indirectly can come from such knowledge. As such, Americans today do not have the deep belief in knowledge that was more prevalent in the past. According to Gabler: “It is no secret, especially here in America, that we live in a post-Enlightenment age in which rationality, science, evidence, logical argument and debate have lost the battle in many sectors, and perhaps even in society generally, to superstition, faith, opinion and orthodoxy.”<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, according to Gabler, this change has affected the university as well. “There is the retreat in universities from the real world, and an encouragement of and reward for the narrowest specialization rather than for daring — for tending potted plants rather than planting forests.”<sup>37</sup>

In explaining what has been lost, Gabler also expresses the core of what it means to have an idea-oriented knowledge of the world, an approach that he believes was more common in the past:

We [as academics in the past who had a healthier view of the task of the university] also collected information to convert it into something larger than facts and ultimately more useful — into ideas that made sense of the information. We sought not just to apprehend the world but to truly

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<sup>35</sup> John Naisbitt, Nana Naisbitt, and Douglas Philips, *High Tech High Touch: Technology and Our Accelerated Search for Meaning* (Naperville, IL: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2001), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Neal Gabler, “The Elusive Big Idea” in *Sunday Review: The Opinion Pages: New York Times* (August 13, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Gabler, “The Elusive Big Idea.”

comprehend it, which is the primary function of ideas. Great ideas explain the world and one another to us.<sup>38</sup>

According to Gabler, Americans have come to value information more than ideas.

“We prefer knowing to thinking because knowing has more immediate value.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Secularization, Followed by a Post-Secular View*

In science, in politics, and in many aspects of life, a longstanding trend in Western society was the move away from the influence of religion, a trend known as secularization:

The founders of the discipline of sociology (most notably Emile Durkheim and Max Weber) define secularization as the slow erosion of religion’s power and influence as modernity grows and flourishes.... What both they and many other ordinary folks thought they were observing (at least in western Europe, the source of almost all their data) was religion’s slow but inevitable demise. Whether one liked what was happening or not, secularization seemed to be a simple fact of life. Religion was no longer as important as it had once been, and it seemed generally on the wane. Some people thought that it might eventually disappear altogether.<sup>40</sup>

In everyday life in the United States, this trend included actions such as removing the Ten Commandments from public display, debating about removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance, or removing Christian symbols and words from public accompaniments of Christmas. The same trend has also been seen in higher education:

For most of the twentieth century, and especially since the Second World War, higher education has been largely a secular enterprise. The goal of a college or university education has been to provide students with scholarly ways of understanding both themselves and the world around them that required little or no appeal to God, religion, or the sacred. The underlying assumption seemed to be that as research and rational reflection explained more and more of the world, religion would become an increasingly unnecessary part of human life. Higher education prepares students for the

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<sup>38</sup> Gabler, “The Elusive Big Idea.”

<sup>39</sup> Gabler, “The Elusive Big Idea.”

<sup>40</sup> Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press US, 2008), 5.



future, and religion was not particularly relevant for the future as it was envisioned at most universities.<sup>41</sup>

And yet, Jacobsen describes a new turn, as implied by the end of the quote above, a transition she sees from secularity to a post-secular society. Religion was not on a path to inevitable irrelevance. "Far from fading into oblivion, religion seems to be increasing its visibility and influence; secularization is no longer the default assumption."<sup>42</sup>

In Jacobsen's view, secularization and secularism are two very different things. Secularization is a neutral term describing an observation of society. In particular, it describes the trend of religion's decreasing influence of public life. In contrast, "Secularism is an ideology promoted by devotees who encourage free-thinking people everywhere to work for religion's demise."<sup>43</sup>

As noted earlier, Jacobsen also saw higher education as having a tendency toward skepticism and having a greater focus on secular issues. But that tendency turned into a form of secularism in the 1960s. Those who hold to secularism answer the question of the relationship between the church and the academy by saying that the church has no place in the world of higher education:

These institutions shifted from being quietly secular institutions... to being more visibly secularist institutions where religion was intentionally pushed to the side.<sup>44</sup>

By the late 1970s, religion as a matter of living faith and practice had essentially been bleached from the goals and purposes of higher education at the nation's major universities.<sup>45</sup>

But, in Jacobsen's view, the world has changed again:

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<sup>41</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, ix.

<sup>42</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, ix.

<sup>43</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 10.



A generation later, the religious landscape in America has changed once again. Rather than disappearing, the power and influence of religion seems to be growing.... If secularization means that the world is getting a little less religious every day, then we live in a postsecular world.<sup>46</sup>

Whether one likes religion or not, it is time to take it seriously and address issues of religion head-on.<sup>47</sup>

Religion is not disappearing. We have entered an era when secularization is not in the ascendancy and when secularists are feeling challenged. It is no wonder that people like Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens have recently published hyperbolically critical accounts of religion and its dangers. They sense that the tide has changed, so they are working feverishly to hold back the influence of religion and to reinvigorate the secularist cause.<sup>48</sup>

As such, Jacobsen claims that the divide between religion and the academy, a divide that is pursued by the secularists, is no longer realistic or helpful. The collection of writings in her book explores different ways in which the interchange between faith and higher education should be expressed.

### *Summary*

When looking at the intersection between general society and the university in terms of ideas and spirituality, there is a significant connection. Society exhibits a strong belief in the value of knowledge, particularly when that knowledge is drawn from science and leads toward advanced technology. Yet this valuing of knowledge in general society today is of a different kind than it was in the past, showing an increasing concern for information and a decreasing concern for the deeper ideas behind the information. At the same time, while American society had seemingly been moving toward an emphasis on being secular, relegating faith to private settings, there is evidence that society as well as

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<sup>46</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Jacobsen, *The American University*, 10.

the university are becoming post-secular, making room for some aspects of spirituality in the public arena.

### **Ideas and Spirituality in the Intersection between the Church and the University**

Having considered aspects of the culture of the university and how that culture is reflected in general society, the focus of this review now shifts to relating the culture of the university specifically to Christianity. This broad topic is far too big to receive reasonable treatment in this chapter, so the focus here is on the two realms assumption (to be defined below), the move in the church away from theology and toward a more generic spirituality, and the expectation of antagonism between these two realms.

#### *The Church's Self-Marginalization with the Two Realms Assumption*

When considering the relationship between the church and the academic world, a fundamental assumption that many have written against is the assumption that these two organizations are working in two fundamentally different realms. According to these writers, the world of faith and spirituality is wrongly assumed to be fundamentally different from the world of thought and knowledge. For example, Sloan describes this move toward the division of the world into two domains as a narrowing of what it means to know, a narrowing that leaves religion with little place in the world of knowledge:

The conception of knowledge and of knowable reality that has come during the past centuries to dominate modern culture and education has left little place for the concerns and affirmations of religion. The dominant conception of knowing that has shaped modern consciousness and culture, while quite powerful, has been extremely narrow.<sup>49</sup>

Sloan sees the adoption of this narrow view of knowledge as something that the church willingly promoted. "In important ways, both liberal and conservative churches

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), viii.

had gone along with, even cooperated actively in, their own removal from the center of things.”<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, the church did so in part, according to Sloan, in an effort to retain a legitimate place for religion in people’s lives. With the encroachment of science and reason into the domain of faith, even calling into question the legitimacy of religious faith itself, the church saw the division of reality into two different domains, one of knowledge and one of faith, as a way to put faith above the attacks from intellectuals. Prove what skeptics may, faith could still stand. Yet this approach also relegated faith to the private corners of life. It was a personal choice. Faith was safe, but it was also irrelevant to public discourse. According to Sloan,

[P]robably the most common [response to the challenge of critical scholarship], certainly for mainline Protestantism and for many others as well, has been to adopt some version of what can be called a two-realm theory of truth. This is the view that on the one side there are the truths of knowledge as these are given predominantly by science and discursive, empirical reason. On the other side are the truths of faith, religious experience, morality, meaning, and value. The latter are seen as grounded not in knowledge but variously in feeling, ethical action, communal convention, folk tradition, or unfathomable mystical experience.<sup>51</sup>

This approach, according to Sloan, has strengths in that it makes room for the church to value the aspects of knowledge that the dominant view does not. Furthermore, the church is at least sometimes valued by the academy for playing an important role that the academy does not. “The church may be viewed as a primary remaining institution for socialization in ethic and moral principles.”<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, this approach also has significant weaknesses:

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<sup>50</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, ix.

<sup>52</sup> Gordon F. De Jong and Joseph E. Faulkner, “Religion and Intellectuals: Findings from a Sample of University Faculty,” *Review of Religious Research* 14, no. 1 (October 1, 1972), 23.

It justifies and perpetuates the basic dualism that is a chief hallmark of the modern world: the split between subject and object, fact and value, theory and practice, self and other, science and the humanities, and so on, including, of course, the deep abyss between faith and knowledge.

More important still, the balance between the two realms of truth is unequal. The realm of faith, meaning, and values is constantly put on the defensive and undercut by the incursions of a narrow, positivistic knowledge and its accompanying materialistic worldview.<sup>53</sup>

One response by the church to this marginalization that Sloan describes is primarily pastoral. In effect, the church tried to establish a place for itself in higher education by making spiritual life more accessible and relevant to students. "The emphasis in most of this work [of the church to engage the campus] was mainly on Bible study, worship, personal counseling, and providing social opportunities. There was little during these early years of a concerted and determined effort to engage the intellectual life."<sup>54</sup>

The other response is for the church to try to reclaim a place at the table in the world of thought. "The church's claim to have a legitimate voice in higher education depended on its ability to demonstrate an essential connection between faith and knowledge."<sup>55</sup>

Sloan argues that this connection is legitimate and that it should be pursued. The interaction between the realms faith and knowledge should be rich and generative in both directions. "The traffic between them will run in all directions, knowledge in one [realm] opening up possibilities for new insights and understanding in the others."<sup>56</sup>

According to Sloan, only to focus on the more quantitative view of knowledge that is common in the secular realm is to acquiesce to the narrow view of knowledge

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<sup>53</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, ix.

<sup>54</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, viii.

<sup>56</sup> Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, 236.

promoted by modernists. Only to focus on the more qualitative view of knowledge, that is, the religious realm, is to acquiesce to the equally narrow view of knowledge promoted by postmodernists. The best approach is to find a way to take seriously and to integrate both the qualitative and the quantitative view of what it means to know.

In a similar way, Blamires also sees the separation of two worlds, and he similarly sees the marginalization of the church in that approach. That is, the university not only is a secular institution, it has become a promoter of secularism, which Blamires defines as, “the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state.”<sup>57</sup>

As such, according to Blamires, though Christianity is often accused of being narrow minded and closing off doors, it is actually secularism that is guiltier of this offence. In particular, Christians can have both secular and spiritual reasons for doing things. The secularist can only have secular reasons. Accordingly, in speaking to those in the church, he says, “Our over-riding public problem today is that the control of the secular sphere is increasingly in the hands of the secularist. And the secular sphere is far too precious, far too important, to be left in the hands of secularists.”<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, Tracy sees and warns about the marginalization of the church and of theology. An interesting parallel he sees is between art and theology. That is, in the past,

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<sup>57</sup> Harry Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind: Meeting the Challenge of Secularism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 58.

<sup>58</sup> Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind*, 66.

“the work of art, often through its powerful conscious or unconscious negations of present actuality, discloses truth about our common human condition.”<sup>59</sup>

Now, however, the artist is merely engaged in self-revelation and exploration. Today, people adhere to “the belief that the artist is, really, “a bird of paradise,” a romantic soul yearning to express some purely private vision of the self.”<sup>60</sup> The parallel to theology, according to Tracy, is very significant. “Where art is marginalized, religion is privatized.... Indeed, religion suffers even greater losses than art by being the single subject about which many intellectuals can feel free to be ignorant.... [The belief today is that religion is] a private consumer product that some people seem to need.”<sup>61</sup>

According to Wuthnow, accepting this privatization of theology and spirituality comes at a very high cost:

One of the most serious constraints on expressions of the sacred within academic contexts is the separation of reason from emotion and from action that generally characterizes institutions of higher learning.... The spiritual realm is thus increasingly segmented from public discourse, leaving it to hold mastery over only the private or subjective realm.<sup>62</sup>

[H]igher learning has erected a boundary not only between reason and emotion but also between knowledge and moral discourse.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Church's Loss of True Theology*

According to Wells, one critical expression of this acceptance of the division between faith and knowledge is the church's willingness to leave theology in the realm of knowledge, and thus in the hands of the seminary, while the church lives in the world of faith. Rightly understood and practiced, says Wells, theology has multiple elements. “In

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<sup>59</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1991), 12.

<sup>60</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 117.

<sup>63</sup> Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred*, 120.

the past, the doing of theology encompassed three essential aspects in both the Church and the academy: (1) a confessional element [truth], (2) reflection on this confession, and (3) the cultivation of virtues that are grounded in the first two elements.”<sup>64</sup>

Today, however, the church has divided theology into two dimensions: that of reflection and that of practice. Reflection, like the world of reason, is left to the academy, in this case to the Christian academy, i.e., the seminary, while practice, like faith, is left to the church. The pattern has significant implications for how the work of higher education relates to the work of the church, and indeed, perhaps even to how some aspects of higher education operate. “Being practical now substitutes for being theological, for there is little left to theology except practice.”<sup>65</sup>

There is now, according to Wells, an anti-theological mood in the church that directly relates to the acceptance of the two realms assumption. And through this anti-theological mood that now values practicality above theology, the church has lost its realization of the transcendence of God. Moreover, the anti-intellectual tendency of the church that is consistent with the two realms assumption is expressed at least in part as this anti-theological tendency.

According to Lewis, one expression of this anti-theological tendency in the church is its avoidance of hard or controversial questions. The problem, says Lewis, is that growth only comes when such challenging questions are addressed. Avoiding such challenging questions, on the other hand, fits Wells’ description of the anti-theological mood of the church and its tendency to value faith and practicality over careful thinking:

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<sup>64</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 98.

<sup>65</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 112.



The new truth which you do not know and which you need must, in the very nature of things, be hidden precisely in the doctrines you least like and least understand. It is just the same here as in science. The phenomenon which is troublesome, which doesn't fit in with the current scientific theories, is the phenomenon which compels reconsideration and thus leads to new knowledge. Science progresses because scientists, instead of running away from such troublesome phenomena or hushing them up, are constantly seeking them out. In the same way, there will be progress in Christian knowledge only as long as we accept the challenge of the difficult and repellent doctrines. A 'liberal' Christianity which considers itself free to alter the Faith whenever the Faith looks perplexing or repellent *must* be completely stagnant. Progress is made only into a *resisting* material. [emphasis his]<sup>66</sup>

### *Accepting Spirituality rather than Religion*

The two realms assumption is also expressed in another division, and that division is between spirituality and religion. This divide has actually been seen as a promising approach used to bring issues related to God back into higher education. That is, post-secular higher education welcomes spirituality as long as it makes no truth claims, and it accepts religion as long as it stays within the confines of spirituality. According to Speck,

In sum, then, spirituality is seen as antithetical to religion, even though room is left open for religion as long as spirituality does not have to be dependent on it. Religion denotes a set of precepts that must be affirmed; spirituality, on the other hand, does not carry the doctrinal baggage characteristic of religion and allows flexibility because nobody has to believe in a prescribed set of precepts.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Murphy argues for the inclusion of spirituality because it is real whereas religion endeavors to impose its own version of reality on others, thus denying the others' spirituality. In other words, religion approaches spirituality in exactly the wrong way. The right way to include spirituality is to welcome and even to honor each person's spiritual experience rather than to constrain it.

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 91.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce W. Speck and Sherry Lee Hoppe, *Searching for Spirituality in Higher Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 24.



Blamires argues that Christianity would make a terrible mistake to re-enter the academy based upon this assumption. Doing so infects Christians with the presuppositions of the secularist, and as such, the form of Christianity that is welcomed is no longer Christianity. "The characteristic of 'secularist values and judgements' is that they give pre-eminence to man-centered and world-centred (as opposed to God-centered) criteria, to limitedly temporal (as opposed to eternal) standpoints."<sup>68</sup>

According to Blamires, the two realms assumption disallows recognition of God, welcoming only man-centered spirituality. And such spirituality can no longer be considered Christian.

Palmer provides a defense of a form of generic spirituality in higher education that allows room for many different ideas. Its emphasis is on being welcoming, although it seems that this approach may be at the expense of the pursuit of truth. He calls for inviting people to tell their own stories from their own perspectives in an ambience of acceptance. Listeners can ask questions of the storytellers, but it is not the job of the listeners to correct others' stories. His focus is on relating across disciplines and across people, aiming for a synthesis of disparate views. The danger, it seems, is what Blamires described as a man-centered spirituality that leaves little room for God.

### *Expectation of Antagonism*

A significant perspective expressed in the literature in looking at higher education from the vantage point of Christians is to expect an antagonistic relationship. And since professors are key leaders in shaping the thoughts and culture of the university, they are seen as central to the problem:

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<sup>68</sup> Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind*, 117.

What is true of students is true of professors as well [namely, that they are involved in a quest for the spiritual]. However, like Nicodemus, many of them are not open about their quest. Encumbered in some ways by their academic degrees and scholarly activities, and by the professional reputation to be maintained, they seem embarrassed to admit that specters of ignorance, anxiety, and despair often invade their wakeful nights. The perpetual need to appear knowledgeable and self-assured before their students wears them thin.<sup>69</sup>

Graham gives this three-part answer to the question of why professors reject

Christianity:

First, many are reacting against an unsatisfying encounter with something that passes for Christianity in their thinking.

Second, many self-styled intellectuals are agnostic when it comes to religion, even though they may be very trusting in other areas of knowledge.

Third, far too many of our brightest young men and women today have lost hope.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, they have encountered a form of Christianity that is unsatisfying to them, and perhaps would be even to many Christians as well. They also apply an inconsistent standard to Christianity, demanding greater proof there than they do in other disciplines. And they have lost hope, giving in to skepticism and despair rather than taking the risk of seriously addressing the claims of Christianity.

Hatch states a negative view of higher education even more strongly:

In the Western democracies, at least, there is strong evidence that the vitality of churches, Catholic or Protestant, has run inversely proportional to the influence of intellectuals in church life. ... My point is that in twentieth-century America, most empirical evidence suggests that custodians of the mind—colleges and universities—do more to undermine rather than support religious life.<sup>71</sup>

Hatch goes on to describe the growing problem of secularism in higher education along with non-thinking “populist Christianity” in churches.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Habib Malik. *The Two Tasks* (Wheaton, IL: EMIS, 2000), 21.

<sup>70</sup> Malik. *The Two Tasks*, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, “Christian Thinking in a Time of Academic Turmoil” in Bob R. Agee, *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 90.

Populist forms of Christianity depict reality in layman's terms. They are not anti-intellectual *per se* but want to depict reality in ways capable of being grasped by a broad range of people. ... This often means that uncomfortable complexity is flattened out, that issues are resolved by a simple choice of alternatives, and that fine distinctions are lost in the din of ideological battle.<sup>72</sup>

### *Summary*

In considering the role of ideas, spirituality, and faith in the intersection between the church and the university, unfortunately some have seen the church as contributing to its own marginalization by accepting, and even sometimes promoting, the assumption that the realm of knowledge and the realm of faith are two separate realms. One tragic result of this assumption is that many in the church have come to give less attention or value to theology, being more concerned with the practical. One seemingly promising open door in the academy for the mission of the church is to accept spirituality while rejecting religion and theology, an approach that actually might be conducive to the inclusion of members of the church who are willing to downplay theology. And yet, doing so may fail to bring the true Gospel to the academy. As such, many have written of the ongoing expectation of antagonism between the church and higher education.

### **Christian Faculty and the University**

This chapter now shifts from a focus on describing the university and how both general society and churches relate to the ideas of the university, to a focus on strategies for Christian engagement of the academic world. One of the obvious strategies for bridging the world of faith and the world of knowledge is through the active work of Christian faculty. As those who are already in teaching and leadership roles in the university, these people can play a unique and significant role. Obviously this issue raises

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<sup>72</sup> Hatch, "Christian Thinking," 91.

the questions of how many Christian faculty there are, what they are like, and how they might contribute to this issue.

### *A 1904 Perspective*

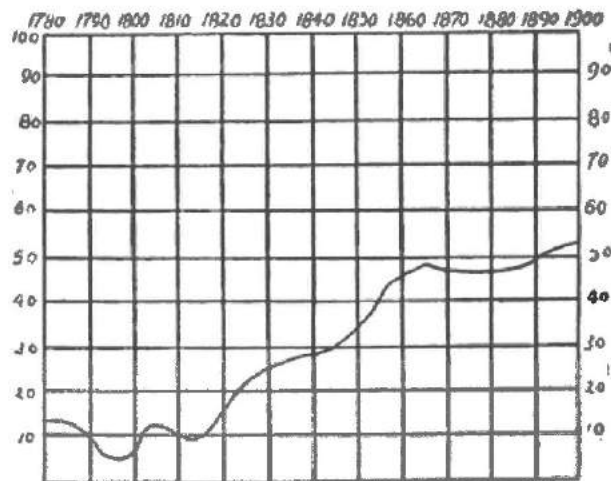
A fascinating perspective of the status of Christianity in higher education is offered by Hardy. Published in 1904, this historical study was written as a counterpoint to the assumption commonly held at the time that higher education was a key bastion of non-Christian actions and behavior. Based upon his study, Hardy argues that the presence of Christianity in higher education, particularly among students, mirrored general society quite well over time. In fact, he argues, the academic setting regularly demonstrated a higher alignment with Christianity than society in general. Figure 2 shows a summary of Hardy's findings. Hardy summarizes the pattern he found which goes against what he saw as the common assumption of his day:

In the historical study it has been noted that in every single instance the characteristic fluctuations of religious life in the college correspond with similar fluctuations among men outside, with this distinction, however, that the religious tone of the college is invariably a little higher. When infidelity held sway among the students, one hundred years ago, it was also evident everywhere among thinking men, but in the colleges it became less gross and licentious.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Edwin Noah Hardy, *The Churches and Educated Men: A Study of the Relation of the Church to Makers and Leaders of Public Opinion* (Philadelphia, PA: The Heidelberg Press, 1904), 280.

*Percentage of Male College Student Church-Members by Decades for 125 years.*



**Figure 2: Christians in the Academic Setting through 1904**

Source: Edwin Noah Hardy, *The Churches and Educated Men: A Study of the Relation of the Church to Makers and Leaders of Public Opinion* (Philadelphia, PA: The Heidelberg Press, 1904), 280.

He goes on to quote John R. Mott, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1946 and leader of the YMCA as saying, "Taking the young men of North America as a whole, not more than one in twelve are Christians, whereas in the institutions of higher learning about one in two of the young men are Christians."<sup>74</sup>

### *Faith in the Academy Today*

In terms of faith in the academy today, there continues to be a significant percentage of students who express adherence to some form of Christianity. In a study of over 112,000 first year students at over 236 diverse institutions of higher education in the US, the following distribution of religious preference was found.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> John Raleigh Mott, *The Students of North American United* (New York, NY: International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1903), 19.

<sup>75</sup> *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose* (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA), 17.

Religious Preference	Percent
Roman Catholic	28
None	17
Baptist	13
Other Christian	11
Methodist	6
Lutheran	5
Presbyterian	4
Church of Christ	3
Other Religion	3
Episcopalian	2
Jewish	2
Buddhist	1
Eastern Orthodox	1
Hindu	1
Islamic	1
United Church of Christ	1
Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)	4
7th Day Adventist	4
Unitarian	4
Quaker	2

**Table 3: Religious Preferences of Incoming Freshmen**

Source: *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose* (Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA), 17.

Obviously how many of these students would be considered to be true Christians is open to significant debate, yet it seems that over 80% would consider themselves to be Christian. In terms of the number who would consider themselves “born-again Christians,” the researchers say, “About one-fourth (26%) of the freshmen say that they consider themselves to be born-again Christians, with the following groups showing the highest percentages: Baptist (70%), ‘other Christians’ (59%), and 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist (51%).”<sup>76</sup>

It is not obvious how one might compare these data with those reported by Hardy. Yet given Hardy’s results that something more than half of students were Christian, it is conceivable that he would have found an even greater percentage today.

<sup>76</sup> *The Spiritual Life of College Students*, 17.

On the other hand, many writers have noted a much different picture among faculty. In particular, they say that faith is far less common in the academy than in general society, and thus, the wrong assumption that Hardy sought to correct in his day actually is accurate today. According to Richardson, “The phenomenon of faculty unbelief is well established, though it is not clear what factors drive the phenomenon.”<sup>77</sup>

Of particular interest in Richardson’s report is evidence he gives of this pattern of less faith in the academy than in society as a whole. For example, he says, only 5-7% of Americans self-identify as atheists or agnostics, while 21% of professors identify themselves as such. And yet, such a statement uses too broad a brush. According to Wuthnow’s research, the trend and path away from faith is not the same in all disciplines. “Those majoring in the social sciences were most likely to have been raised in nonreligious families, humanities students were most likely to have defected from the religion in which they were brought up, and natural science students were more likely to have retained their religious faith.”<sup>78</sup>

Lewis made a similar claim about the influence of one’s discipline on one’s attitude about religion. “Mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists are often religious, even mystical; biologists much less often; economists and psychologists very seldom indeed. It is as their subject matter comes nearer to man himself that their anti-religious bias hardens.”<sup>79</sup>

Surprisingly, Richardson claims (although with a very important caveat of a limited sample size) that being in higher education does not seem to have been what

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<sup>77</sup> Richardson, D.W., Jr., “Accepting Christian Faith in the Academy” (Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, 2001), <http://www.daverichardson.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Accepting-Christian-Faith-In-The-Academy.pdf>, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred*, 147

<sup>79</sup> Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 135



influenced these people in his study way from faith. Rather, they brought these views with them, a view he attributes to other writers as well:

Wuthnow (1989, 1978), Anderson (1968), and Finkelstein (1984) seem to show that professors carry their unbelief into their academic careers, rather than being socialized to unbelief through their scholarly training. Most professors enter academic careers with an intact belief structure that seldom fluctuates even with the secularizing influence of most universities. When asked if their academic training, research, and teaching duties had changed their religious beliefs, around 70% of professors surveyed said "no" (Thalheimer, 1965). Of those who said "yes," change was as likely toward more religiosity as it was to less. Thalheimer's study is very important, as few researchers have studied this phenomenon among professors, though the small sample may not allow one to generalize well to all American faculty.<sup>80</sup>

### *The Nature of Faith in the Academy*

Furthermore, De Jong and Faulkner argue that those who identify themselves as being religious in the academy have a unique type of religion. That is, they engage in religious life, but they are less orthodox than their counterparts in general society. Over half attend church regularly, pray, and read the Bible, yet these practices are demythologized. That is, their religion is more about "ethicalism" (putting primary emphasis on the promotion of moral values) and less about God:

[Our data] offer additional support for Stark and Glock's (1968) contention that orthodox Christian beliefs are on their way out and the dawn of a post-Christian era is signaled.<sup>81</sup>

The single largest group of respondents [in their study] define a religious person as having humanitarian moral and ethical concerns, and over half of the respondents pointed to these principles as latent aspects of everyday decision-making.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Richardson, D.W., Jr., "Accepting Christian Faith in the Academy," 42.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon F. De Jong and Joseph E. Faulkner, "Religion and Intellectuals: Findings from a Sample of University Faculty," *Review of Religious Research* 14, no. 1 (October 1, 1972), 23.

<sup>82</sup> De Jong, "Religion and Intellectuals," 23.



### *Faith Among the Elites*

Gross and Simmons tell a fascinating story of the shift in higher education, particular in the elite institutions, that took place in the latter twentieth century. As they tell it, the purposes of the university in the United States were once closely aligned with the purposes of the church. "In their early years, America's colleges and universities served religious ends."<sup>83</sup>

The academy's emphasis was on preparing men for ministry as well as a citizenship founded in Christianity. "Their primary mandate remained that of instructing students in the classics and teaching them lessons in theology and moral philosophy that would prepare them for the business of citizenship and life."<sup>84</sup>

But then a shift began, especially at elite institutions. "Professors began thinking of themselves as scientists and scholars whose major task was to seek out truth, not to propagate religious dogma. [They thus began to demand academic freedom] to pursue truth even when it offended religious or political authorities."<sup>85</sup>

In the latter part of the twentieth century, a significant shift came with a greater diversity among those faculty who were entering the system:

The secularization of American higher education was completed in the 1970s and 1980s with the mass hiring of new faculty who, shaped by the social movements of the 1960s, were deeply suspicious of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. As a result of this process, or so the story goes, academe finally became, in the words of historian George Marsden, "a haven largely freed from religious perspectives." ... In broad brushstroke this story is not wrong, but it leads too readily to the conclusion that, as a result of secularization, most college and university professors today are irreligious.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors" in Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen. *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>84</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 19.

<sup>85</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 19.

<sup>86</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 20.

In Gross's view, seeing most professors as irreligious is an overstatement. Based upon their survey in 2006, they found a more complex situation. "We found that while college and university professors on the whole are indeed less religious than other Americans, it is hardly the case that the professorial landscape is characterized by an absence of religion."<sup>87</sup>

For example, Table 4 shows a comparison based upon data Gross gives from a 2000 survey of the general public in the United States with their 2006 survey and professors.

	<b>Professors</b>	<b>General public</b>
<b>Atheist</b>	10%	2.8%
<b>Agnostic</b>	13.4%	4.1%

**Table 4: Atheists and Agnostics among Professors and the General Public<sup>88</sup>**

While adherents to atheism and agnosticism were far more common among faculty than in the general public, they are also far from the majority. In their study, just 23.5% of faculty were agnostic or atheistic. Almost as many (19.6%) expressed belief in a Higher Power rather than in a personal God. But more importantly, "Well over half the surveyed professors can be described as believers in God."<sup>89</sup>

A very significant part of their study was to explore differences within the academic world. A prominent difference was between elite institutions and the rest. "Professors at elite doctoral-granting universities are less religious than professors teaching at other kinds of institutions."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 20.

<sup>88</sup> Based on data from Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors." 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 21.

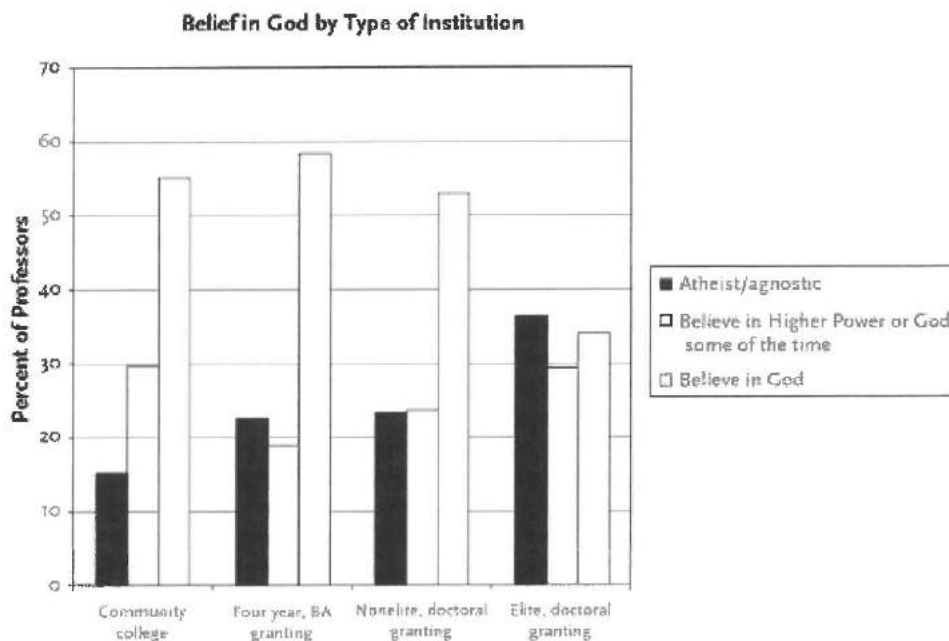
<sup>90</sup> Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 21.

For example, Gross reports that, whereas fewer than one in four faculty at the non-elite schools are atheist or agnostic, more than one in three faculty at elite institutions are (see Table 5).

	Elite doctoral granting institutions	Non-elite doctoral granting institutions
Atheist or agnostic	36.6%	23.5%

Table 5: Atheists and Agnostics at Elite and Non-Elite Institutions<sup>91</sup>

Figure 3 illustrates the differences they found among types of institutions. Belief in a personal God dominated all three types of non-elite institutions. In contrast, more faculty in the elite institutions were atheistic or agnostic than expressed an ongoing belief in a personal God.



**Figure 3: Belief in God by Type of Institution**

Source: Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors." 24.

<sup>91</sup> Based on data in Gross, "The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors," 23.

An even more stark comparison arises when looking at those who consider themselves “born again Christians.” This group is quite common overall in the study, but almost non-existent at the elite schools:

About a third of professors who believe in God consider themselves to be born-again Christians [which, based on the graph above, is around 17%]. ... Professors who are born-again are extremely rare at elite doctoral institutions, composing only about 1 percent of professors at such institutions, but they are not uncommon among community college professors and professors teaching at baccalaureate schools.<sup>92</sup>

A strong majority of professors at elite doctoral universities (72.9 percent) [take] the ‘ancient book of fables’ view [of the Bible].<sup>93</sup>

The authors’ conclusion is that the elite institutions are significantly different from other institutions of higher education. “Our findings indicate that, when it comes to religion, professors at elite research universities and professors at local community colleges inhabit different worlds, embracing what the sociologist Karin Knorr Cetina would call different ‘epistemic cultures,’ or cultures of knowledge making.”<sup>94</sup>

Another fascinating variation that the study reveals is between different disciplines. It is not clear from the publication if these numbers relate to their overall survey population or just faculty from elite institutions (which the high percentages would suggest). They also made an interesting choice of reporting two different scales for the higher and lower ends of the range which makes it difficult to make direct comparisons, yet the variations seem clear.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 25.

<sup>93</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 26.

<sup>94</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 28.

<sup>95</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 25.

Discipline	Atheists and Agnostics	No doubts about God's existence
Psychology and biology	61%	
Mechanical engineering	50%	
Economics, political science, computer science	40%	
Accounting		63%
Elementary Education		56.8%
Finance		46.8%
Marketing		46.5%
Arts		46.2%
Criminal justice		46.2%
Nursing		44.4%

Table 6: Atheists and Agnostics across Disciplines<sup>96</sup>

The authors make two other significant observations. First, they did not find evidence that the academy had a fundamental problem with faith, at least personal faith, being in the academy. “While faculty may want to keep prayer out of the classroom and to keep religion and science apart, they do not believe that colleges and universities are poisonous climates for faith.”<sup>97</sup>

Second, there was a significant correlation between faith and political positions:

There are some born-again Christians in the professoriate who are political liberals, but the vast majority of born-again faculty appear to be conservative as measured by party affiliation.... This suggests that, within the professoriate, conservative political views are often linked with religious views.<sup>98</sup>

Such a correlation raises significant questions about both the causes and the consequences of the distribution of religious perspectives in elite as well as mainstream institutions of higher education.

### *Reasons for Less Belief*

In addition to recognizing trends of belief in higher education, Hardy offers a fascinating interpretation of the tendency by some in higher education to be very

<sup>96</sup> Based on data in Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 24.

<sup>97</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 27.

<sup>98</sup> Gross, “The Religious Convictions of College and University Professors,” 28.

skeptical of Christianity and perhaps thus contributing to a general assumption of the antagonism between the academy and Christianity. That is, the same value of independent thinking that is common and valued in the academic setting leads some to distance themselves from the church with its pressure to adhere to dogma while it also leads others to positions of great leadership in the church:

The student is early taught to be an investigator, an independent thinking and keen-eyed observer. He becomes thus an animated interrogator, less given to submissive acquiescence, to ready-made creeds and theories, more inclined to unhesitating championship of the real and the true. His questioning attitude tends to skepticism and religious indifference, while his passion for reality prepares him for unsurpassed leadership in religious affairs when convinced of the essential truths of Christianity.<sup>99</sup>

This changed mental attitude [toward questioning] may explain the occasion of religious indifference of some graduates in some churches where sentiment takes the place of sense [that is, sound judgment] in Christian work.<sup>100</sup>

Edwards argues that, even when faculty do have religious faith, they tend not to be vocal about it. Among the reasons he identifies are:

- One's religion is often unrelated to one's research and teaching.
- Some are fearful of discrimination.
- Academic disciplines have moved away from appealing to God or being influenced by belief in God as compared to earlier in their history. This tendency was first seen in the sciences (that is, the move to appeal to natural causes rather than using God as an explanation) and then later it grew in other disciplines.
- Peer review as a basis for advancement discourages people from raising unpopular views that are not necessary for one's discipline.

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<sup>99</sup> Hardy, *The Churches and Educated Men*, 284.

<sup>100</sup> Hardy, *The Churches and Educated Men*, 284.

### *Strategies for Christian Faculty*

Edwards suggests two strategies that faculty can employ who want to find appropriate ways to integrate their faith with their work in the academy. The first is to practice appropriate self-disclosure, letting students know one's own religious views. Doing so helps students better understand the perspectives of their instructors. It can also model critical thinking about one's own perspectives and how those perspectives relate to academic pursuits.

The second strategy is to take seriously those situations where there is a connection between one's religious convictions and one's academic discipline. Certainly this connection is obvious when moral issues are at play, and moral issues are important in various situations of all disciplines, not the least of which is academic integrity, an issue that obviously relates to all areas of study. But certainly there are also less obvious connections that occur in different ways in different disciplines. Whether obvious or not, Christian faculty ought to take such connections seriously and to use them as opportunities to break down the barriers between faith and thought.

Of course both of these strategies require wisdom, for they can both be abused and mishandled. Yet rightly handled, they can be appropriate and helpful for faculty and for students.

Richardson further argues that bringing questions of faith into the academic setting would be welcomed, even by atheists:

Christian professors need to be more proactive in initiating discussions with their apostate colleagues. At the end of our interview, one atheist stated, "The discussion of the type that you and I had, ... more of this should be happening, actually, because people will see each other better in my opinion." Another atheist candidly admitted, "I never talk of it [with my Christian colleagues, but] I am very interested in the question [of religion], naturally



interested. I would like to know what is at the bottom of it.” Of the 11 subjects in this study, five apostate professors mentioned their desire to discuss issues of God and faith with their colleagues. One specifically said that he was curious. He had little spiritual background growing up, and has wondered at the faith of his Christian colleagues. He would like to know more. His colleagues only need to speak up. If Christians approach their colleagues like I did, as if they were on a fact-finding mission of understanding rather than treating the nonbeliever as a target or project, the nonbeliever will open up and talk about these issues.<sup>101</sup>

Richardson describes these right kinds of conversations this way:

Additionally, it is important that these serious discussions be good-natured. One professor specifically pointed out the lack of humor in evangelical Christianity. This by itself was a deterrent to him. It is true that many evangelicals appear to be grim, serious, and cheerless. Most people love to have fun, and people having fun are fun to be around. Interject personality and humor in these dialogues as appropriate with one’s individual style. Continued dialogue, service, answering questions, and building relationships with love and concern while laughing and living life together may result in apostate professors committing their lives to Jesus Christ.<sup>102</sup>

### *The Tendency by the Church to Ignore Professors*

Given the importance of the role of Christian faculty in the academy, and given the challenges they face, it is tragic that the church, according to Richardson, has largely ignored them:

In the idiom of mission studies, university professors are a large “unreached people group” in the United States. Nearly 1 million people teach and research in our colleges and universities. A large number of them are not Christian, with many being atheist and agnostic. Most churches and ministries avoid evangelizing professors, considering them too difficult to reach. Yet, this group of people is extremely influential in our culture. Universities are major wellsprings of culture, and professors are its gatekeepers. They need to be reached with the gospel.<sup>103</sup>

### *Summary*

In summary, Christian faculty are in a strategic position to bring the Gospel to the university environment. Depending upon one’s discipline and institution, however, such

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<sup>101</sup> Richardson, “Accepting Christian Faith in the Academy,” 83.

<sup>102</sup> Richardson, “Accepting Christian Faith in the Academy,” 84.

<sup>103</sup> Richardson, “Accepting Christian Faith in the Academy,” 1.



faculty may be in a very small minority, and there might be significant challenges in the very nature of the academic setting to some aspects of faith. Nevertheless, some authors have suggested strategies for individual faculty to seek to engage the academic setting with the Gospel. Sadly the church often provides far less support or attention to this group than it ought to receive given its strategic position.

### **Campus Ministers and the University**

Another strategy for addressing the gap between Christianity and higher education is to have people serve as chaplains or campus ministers. What is included here is but a brief pointer to a wealth of resources in the literature. This description from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describes the context for campus ministers' work:

Private institutions that have, or once had, religious affiliations of some kind often employ a campus chaplain, who coordinates other religious groups on campus and counsels students, professors, and administrators.

Public institutions, however, usually do not hire a campus chaplain. Instead, members of the clergy from a variety of religious affiliations work on the campus doing virtually the same work as a campus chaplain, but they are paid by their own religious denominations and are not college employees.<sup>104</sup>

A number of publications from the 1960s specifically address the role of chaplains. *Meet me at the Door* provides an autobiographical approach to orienting someone to life as a chaplain on the university campus. *Campus Clergyman* describes the effort to make the role of a chaplain more professional. *Case Studies in Campus Ministry* provides one approach to being a chaplain at a secular institution, an approach that appears to be agnostic in terms of particular religious beliefs and practices. "At best, the secular campus can be the kind of community in which persons are able to grow [to become more fully human as they engage in the search for truth and understanding]. The

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<sup>104</sup> Jennifer Jacobsen, "Careers in Campus Chaplaincy" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 12, 2003).

responsibility of the campus ministry is to strengthen them in this process of humanization.”<sup>105</sup>

A more recent publication addresses the rising concern of biblical illiteracy. Those involved in campus ministry at secular schools would be wise to make few assumptions about what people do or do not know:

Careful observers of American life are now saying that biblical illiteracy is so pervasive that it represents a culture change of major significance.<sup>106</sup>

Mainline campus ministries must reorient themselves to a situation in which we cannot assume that people in general, faculty and staff as well as students, possess even rudimentary knowledge of the Christian faith.<sup>107</sup>

Writing of the role of campus ministers more broadly, Woodruff calls for them to engage all the people of campus on various levels:

We are called to stand in the center of the University as prophets and pastors, and to engage the students, faculty and staff in the broadest ways possible. This includes evangelism and discipleship. And it also includes issues of social justice, such as racial reconciliation. But it also includes the world of ideas.<sup>108</sup>

While public institutions are unlikely to hire a campus chaplain, some of them provide significant support to those working in ministry on the campus. For example, Michigan State University is very supportive of the Religious Advisors Association, an association that lists 47 member organizations, over 40 of which appear to be specifically Christian groups. The association’s purpose is expressed in this mission statement:

The Religious Advisors Association exists to assist the campus ministers and religious leaders in their ministry to the University community. It also seeks to promote understanding and fellowship among the members themselves in

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<sup>105</sup> Jones B. Shannon and Church Society for College Work, *Case Studies in the Campus Ministry: An Occasional Paper* (Cambridge, MA: Church Society for College Work, 1968), 21.

<sup>106</sup> Donald G. Shockley, *Campus Ministry: The Church Beyond Itself* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>107</sup> Shockley, *Campus Ministry*, 115.

<sup>108</sup> Mike Woodruff, “Of Mice and Ministry: An Historical Critique of Campus Ministry”, n.d., <http://www.intervarsity.org/mx/item/7417/> (accessed December 12, 2011).

order that they might contribute more significantly to the whole educational process at Michigan State University.<sup>109</sup>

A significant resource for campus ministers around the country is The Ascent

Network:

The Ascent Network is an informal affiliation of campus ministers committed to seeing the work of the kingdom expressed to the campus primarily through the local church. We exist primarily for four reasons:

- To encourage individuals and communities in their journey with Christ as it relates to issues around the campus, the church, and their personal lives.
- To provide avenues for the exchange of ideas and resources, human and other.
- To gather people together, in community, to discover what God is up to and to assist one another in getting there.
- To develop leadership in the church, on the campus, in the marketplace, all around the world in all aspects of Kingdom work.<sup>110</sup>

### **The Church and The Secular University**

This final section reviews literature that specifically addresses the role of the church itself in this intersection between Christianity and secular higher education.

#### *Why the Church Must Take Secular Higher Education Seriously*

Many people have written calls to the church to take secular higher education more seriously. For example, Malik argues strenuously that the church must give greater attention to the university:

In view of the unique place and power of the university today I know of no more important question to ask than: What does Jesus Christ think of the

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<sup>109</sup> Michigan State University Religious Advisors Association: About RAA, <https://www.msu.edu/~msuraa/raahistory.html> (accessed December 21, 2011).

<sup>110</sup> Ascent, University Presbyterian Church, <http://www.upc.org/umin/ascent.aspx> (accessed December 21, 2011).

university? All other questions without exception are relatively silly when this question looms in the mind.<sup>111</sup>

Since the university determines the course of events and the destiny of man more than any other institution or agency today, it is impossible for a Christian not to ask the question: What does Jesus Christ think of the university? To a Christian this question is an absolute imperative.<sup>112</sup>

The great universities control the mind of the world! Therefore how can evangelism consider its task accomplished if it leaves the university unevangelized? And how can evangelism evangelize the university if it cannot speak to the university? And how can it speak to the university if it is not itself already intellectualized? Therefore evangelism must first intellectualize itself to be able to speak to the university and therefore to be able to evangelize the university and therefore to save the world.<sup>113</sup>

Therefore if evangelization is the most important task, the task that comes immediately after it—not in the tenth place, or even the third place, but in the second place—is not politics, or economics, or the quest for comfort and security and ease, but to find out exactly what is happening to the mind and the spirit in the schools and universities. And once a Christian discovers that there is a total divorce between mind and spirit in the schools and universities, between the perfection of thought and the perfection of soul and character, between intellectual sophistication and the spiritual worth of the individual human person, between reason and faith, between the pride of knowing and the contrition of heart consequent upon being a mere creature, and once he realizes that Jesus Christ will find himself less at home on the campuses of the great universities in Europe and America than almost anywhere else, he will be profoundly disturbed, and he will inquire what can be done to recapture the great universities for Jesus Christ—the universities which would not have come into being in the first place without him.<sup>114</sup>

The Center for the Study of Campus Ministry expresses the same conviction this way: “When the church inquires into its mission in higher education, it is inquiring into its call and courage to be present in those places where the future is being shaped and where individuals who will assume leadership are being educated and formed.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Habib Malik, “The Two Tasks,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 4 (December 1980), 296.

<sup>114</sup> Malik, “The Two Tasks,” 292.

<sup>115</sup> *The Mission of the Church*, 13

Wuthnow states that higher education has always been central to how the church reaches the broader society. “Academies have always been among the most significant means by which religious institutions sought to influence the beliefs and values of their host societies.”<sup>116</sup>

The Lausanne Movement, in its 2010 Cape Town sessions, states as the second of its “four-fold vision and hope” this point specifically expressing its commitment to being involved in the domain of the academic world, a world which they refer to as the “realm of ideas.” “Secondly, we want to bring a fresh challenge to ‘bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching, in every part of the world—not only geographically, but in every sphere of society, and in the realm of ideas’, identifying and responding to key issues.”<sup>117</sup>

Unfortunately, in the view of many, the church has lost much of its voice and presence in the academic world. As stated by Sloan earlier, the church even cooperated with its own isolation from that setting. The church has ignored the academy far too much, and doing so has come at a great cost to the church in particular and to society in general.

### *Loving God with All of One's Being, Including the Mind*

In addition to giving greater attention to the university, many have also called for the church to recognize the importance of loving God with all of one's mind. The church is not merely to care about thinking because it is a means to reach the university; thinking carefully is central to its love for God. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to

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<sup>116</sup> Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred*, 105

<sup>117</sup> Lindsay Brown, “Our Legacy for the Future” The Lausanne Movement, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/cape-town-2010/articles/1413-our-legacy-for-the-future.html> (accessed December 21, 2011).

love God with all of one's being, "with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength."<sup>118</sup>

Many have written about the importance of loving God with one's mind, again implying that it is a realm that is often given too little importance by Christians. Noll boldly accuses the evangelical church of being non-thinking, a trait that obviously seriously hinders its efforts to reach the academic world in addition to the negative consequences for the church itself:

The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind. An extraordinary range of virtues is found among the sprawling throngs of evangelical Protestants in North America... Notwithstanding all their other virtues, however, American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations.<sup>119</sup>

According to Blamires, "Christianity can never be simply a matter of personal conversion determining the character of moral life. It is also a matter of intellectual enlightenment transforming the whole mental life."<sup>120</sup>

Litfin, in honoring Malik for his leadership in emphasizing the life of the mind, declares his conviction of the centrality of thinking to one's life as a Christian:

First [Charles Malik] understood how utterly foundational this business of thinking is, as Richard Weaver put it in the title of his famous little book, *Ideas Have Consequences*. The Scriptures are replete with this insight; over and over again we are reminded that how and what we think are not matters of moral or spiritual indifference; they determine what we do—indeed, what we are.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Mark 12:30.

<sup>119</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 3.

<sup>120</sup> Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind*, 177.

<sup>121</sup> Charles Habib Malik. *The Two Tasks*, 13.

What Litfin honors is Malik's commitment to the mind, which Malik claims is of equal importance with the battle for the soul. "Responsible Christians face two tasks—that of saving the soul, and that of saving the mind."<sup>122</sup>

Malik goes on to express the battle for the mind as the greatest issue facing the church today:

All our ills stem proximately from the false philosophies that have been let loose in the world and that are now being taught in the universities.<sup>123</sup>

The greatest danger besetting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism.<sup>124</sup>

If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover that you have not won the world.<sup>125</sup>

As such, according to Malik, the university is central to the true task of the church today. "At the heart of the crisis in western civilization lies the state of the mind and the spirit in the universities."<sup>126</sup>

McGrath provides a similar call to thoughtful Christianity. "This book may be seen both as an intellectual defense of the place of theology in the Christian life, and as a plea for the Christian church to take the life of the mind seriously, especially in the light of contemporary public debates."<sup>127</sup>

Noll holds up Jonathan Edwards as a model for how Christians ought to approach the life of the mind. Edwards thought carefully about many disciplines, all with the assumption that God was the source of reality and thus the source of truth. Edwards modeled an approach to thinking in a distinctively Christianly way about many things.

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<sup>122</sup> Malik, "The Two Tasks," 295.

<sup>123</sup> Malik, "The Two Tasks," 295.

<sup>124</sup> Malik, "The Two Tasks," 294.

<sup>125</sup> Malik, "The Two Tasks," 294.

<sup>126</sup> Malik, "The Two Tasks," 293.

<sup>127</sup> Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmermann, *The Passionate Intellect: Incarnational Humanism and the Future of University Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 7.



“The career of Jonathan Edwards shows us how fruitful it can be to love the Lord with the whole mind.”<sup>128</sup>

Noll goes on to express the centrality of careful thinking to the life of the Christian:

The effort to think like a Christian is [not just an academic exercise but] rather an effort to take seriously the sovereignty of God over the world he created, the lordship of Christ over the world he died to redeem, and the power of the Holy Spirit over the world he sustains each and every moment. From this perspective the search for a mind that truly thinks like a Christian takes on ultimate significance, because the search for a Christian mind is not, in the end, a search for mind but a search for God.<sup>129</sup>

Klassen provides a call to Christian university students to engage fully in their education, to affirm common grace, and to deny the dualism of the physical and the spiritual. He calls those in the academies to critique society in the realm of ideas, yet always with humility. According to Klassen, it is good to accept the idea that there are many ideas, even within Christianity, and that Christians do not and will not all agree. Yet with this recognition, he says, one must not let go of the idea of the universal truth of the Gospel. “Strive for integration as a Christian. Never separate faith from learning.”<sup>130</sup> “To think is not a luxury for the Christian but part of the essence of the Christian’s religion.”<sup>131</sup>

Klassen recognizes the risks of critical thinking. He calls students to question their own faith, and to let others question Christian ideas. Doing so is risky, yet obedient Christians have no choice. “Thinking, with all its risks, is mandatory for the Christian.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 79.

<sup>129</sup> Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 253.

<sup>130</sup> Klassen, *The Passionate Intellect*, 186.

<sup>131</sup> Klassen, *The Passionate Intellect*, 194.

<sup>132</sup> Klassen, *The Passionate Intellect*, 195.



Smith sees in the Christian community a significant lack of intellectual Christians. Too much is being accepted among Christians, in his view, without the necessary critical thinking that is more highly valued in the academic world. His book represents his effort to be a Christian intellectual who addresses those ideas that in general are not being addressed critically enough.

### *Working Against the "Two Realms" Assumption*

Another aspect of loving God with all of one's mind is the active effort to integrate faith and knowledge. As described earlier, the two realms assumption sees faith and reason as two separate domains. Furthermore, it views the church as being primarily concerned with faith, which should be its focus, and the secular university as being primarily concerned with reason, which should be its focus. It is when each of these two institutions seeks to step into the other domain, the reasoning goes, that trouble comes.

In contrast, many have written of the importance of working against this two realms assumption. In describing the scandal of this approach, Noll says that Christians "have largely abandoned the universities, the arts, and other realms of 'high' culture."<sup>133</sup> He goes on to quote Richard Hofstadter in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* as blaming American evangelicalism for leading Americans into anti-intellectualism. He describes the process as follows:

One begins with the hardly contestable proposition that religious faith is not, in the main, propagated by logic or learning. One moves on from this to the idea that it is best propagated (in the judgment of Christ and on historical evidence) by men who have been unlearned and ignorant. It seems to follow from this that the kind of wisdom and truth possessed by such men is superior

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<sup>133</sup> Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 3.

to what learned and cultivated minds have. In fact, learning and cultivation appear to be handicaps in the propagation of faith.<sup>134</sup>

Noll argues that the church must work against this assumption of anti-intellectualism which is all too common in the church itself. He offers this advice. "Finally, if evangelicals are ever to cultivate the mind, habits of intuitionism—or the rapid movement from first impressions to final conclusions—must be changed."<sup>135</sup>

The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that some Christian professors have begun to take the initiative from inside the academy to reduce the gap between religion and intellectual thought:

These scholars say they're not suggesting that professors accept something as fact because the Bible says it's so. "There's no Christian table of the elements," one scholar notes. Rather, they are suggesting that they be free to acknowledge that their work takes place against the framework of "responsible" religious views.<sup>136</sup>

It is not surprising that at least some in the academy are rather unimpressed with this effort. "Bruce Kuklick, a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, says the notion that scholars' personal beliefs are compatible with their academic interests is 'loony' and reflects 'a self-indulgent professoriate.'"<sup>137</sup>

In defense of pursuing both faith and reason, the article quotes Hauerwas, professor of theological ethics at Duke Divinity School. "Mr. Hauerwas, an outspoken professor who sprinkles his speech with profanities, believes religious people should

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, [1st ed.]. (New York, NY: Knopf, 1963), 48.

<sup>135</sup> Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 245.

<sup>136</sup> Carolyn J. Mooney, "Devout Professors on the Offensive," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 40, no. 35 (1994), 18.

<sup>137</sup> Mooney, "Devout Professors on the Offensive," 18.

battle out their differences on theological grounds. In an interview, he explains: 'Liberals like to say, You can't impose your views on me. I say, Take people on theologically.'"<sup>138</sup>

Wuthnow argues for a richer intersection between faith and learning by challenging the academic setting to recognize that promoting the sacred is an important part of its own task and that religion is not the only group in society that should be promoting it. The university is actually in a great position to do so because its values contribute to the public expression of the sacred:

One of the most important of these [features that contribute positively to the public expression of the sacred] is the atmosphere of open, unrestrained intellectual inquiry that is often associated with higher education.<sup>139</sup>

The upshot is that students and faculty often find the academy a more conducive setting in which to engage in frank explorations of religious values than virtually anywhere else. In contrast the same person may feel uncomfortable in a congregational setting because certain answers are assumed to be precluded from the outset or because clergy function not only as spiritual guides but as commanders of volunteer labor and charitable donations.<sup>140</sup>

Similarly, Scott argues that the academic world is a great place for students to pursue spirituality. In fact, he says, it is only a recent assumption that higher education would not be a good place for such a pursuit, and perhaps it is an assumption that is already fading:

Having moved from the unexamined integration of the intuitive cosmology in primal cultures to the dualism stretching from the Axial Age to the modern era, we may now formulate a new level of integration, built on the deep knowledge acquired in all the separate disciplines, including science and the world's spiritual traditions.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Mooney, "Devout Professors on the Offensive," 22.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 123.

<sup>140</sup> Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred*, 123.

<sup>141</sup> David C. Scott, "Science and Spirituality" in Bruce W. Speck and Sherry Lee Hoppe, *Searching for Spirituality in Higher Education* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 205.

One of the great challenges for the church in approaching the university environment is the set of assumptions of secularism held by many in that environment. Buttrick calls on Christians to question these faulty assumptions. "Behind the college mind there is sometimes a glib formula: secularism equals objectivity; objectivity equals truth. ... Secularism ... is itself an assumption, namely, that man is only of time and space."<sup>142</sup>

Even though scientists may not admit it, he argues, science is built on assumptions drawn from the Bible:

- The universe is unified.
- Matter is worth studying.
- Time is a progress of purposeful change.

According to Buttrick, other religions and cultures do not assume these ideas that are shared by Christianity and the world of academia. As such, there is a deep connection between Christian thought and the enterprise of higher education, even though on the surface it often seems incompatible. Were those in higher education to study their own assumptions for their field of study, this compatibility would be clearer.

And yet, there is a fundamental conflict between the assumptions of secularism and Christianity. According to Buttrick, a Christian worldview assumes two aspects of our existence: the natural/physical world (a two-dimensional, horizontal world in which man is made of the dust of the earth) and the supernatural world (the vertical dimension in which man is made in the image of God). Secularism claims to live only in the horizontal world, yet as soon as it makes claims about the nature of that world, it is

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<sup>142</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 7.

stepping into the vertical domain while at the same time denying a place for it. As such, people step into the role of God. "By biblical thought, sin is the denial of our creaturehood."<sup>143</sup>

That is, people long to live beyond their two-dimensional existence. Doing so is not possible without a god, and thus people encounter the temptation to become god. In effect, people try to deny their flat constraints. That is, they do not want to accept that they are merely creatures who cannot claim knowledge outside of experience. Some, however, go further and try to deny the vertical domain, thus claiming that people are merely animals with no responsibility beyond that which the other creatures have.

According to Buttrick, Christianity rationally integrates the assumptions of scientific exploration with an understanding of the vertical dimension of human existence. Christians ought, therefore, to be bold in speaking out about these ideas.

Schroeder argues that the church and higher education ought to be "natural partners" in this quest:

In the ideal life of wisdom, human beings achieve a richer personal synthesis which is the fulfillment of the pursuit of truth; discover the highest principles which integrate all knowledge; and learn to combine the theoretical with the practical, self-fulfillment with a concern for the common good, and knowledge with the light of love. The Church and higher education are natural partners in the quest for this kind of wisdom.<sup>144</sup>

As such, both by the church doing a better job of integrating faith and learning, and by the university regaining some of its earlier emphasis on developing students as whole people, the interactions between the church and the university community ought to be greater than they are.

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<sup>143</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 15.

<sup>144</sup> George M. Schroeder, "The Quest for Wisdom" in United States Catholic Conference. Dept. of Education, *The Gospel on Campus: A Handbook of Campus Ministry Programs and Resources* (Edison, NJ: USCCB Publishing, 1996), 11.

## *Challenges in Relating the Church and the University*

Endeavoring to pursue a church-based ministry in the university setting raises multiple challenges. These challenges are found both in the church and in the academy.

### **In the Church: Poor Assumptions about University Ministry**

Shriver (writing in 1968) addresses the tendency of the church to hold “several wrong assumptions about the church’s responsibility towards the university” that hinder the churches’ efforts to engage that community with the Gospel:

- (1) That the only significant reality in a university, as far as the church is concerned, is the student. Assuming this, we have neglected the reality of the teacher, the researcher, the staff specialist, and the administrator who with the student make the university one of the influential bureaucracies of our time, one of the powerful generators of cultural change.
- (2) That the church must “work with students” because they are the “threatened” segment of the university community.
- (3) That the ministry of the church to and in the university is linear, one-way, non-reciprocal.<sup>145</sup>

### **In the University: Lack of Knowledge about Christianity**

Part of what makes the challenge greater is the lack of knowledge about Christianity within the academy:

Misunderstanding plays a role in all this. Many academics turn from church or synagogue sometime in early adolescence, and their image of religion remains what they learned in fourth grade Sunday School. It is as if one assumed that the curriculum of a college mathematics department culminated in long division, or that biological research consisted exclusively in gathering the leaves from different species of trees and pressing them flat under three volumes of the *World Book Encyclopedia*. If those no longer involved with churches want to update their views of religion, they sometimes turn their television dials to the cable evangelists and find most of their prejudices confirmed.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Donald W. Shriver, Jr. “Towards Community In and Around the University” in Jones B. Shannon and Church Society for College Work, *Case Studies in the Campus Ministry: An Occasional Paper* (Cambridge, MA: Church Society for College Work, 1968), 28.

<sup>146</sup> Shriver, “Towards Community In and Around the University,” 8.

Stoner similarly argues that misunderstanding of the nature of religion and of the specifics of Christianity is problematic. “[Those in the modern university] assume that everyone knows what religion is and maybe even that everyone has religious opinions (like political opinions), but they are oblivious to the body of knowledge and field of study devoted to the question of religious truth.”<sup>147</sup>

As such, many people in the university speak about that which they have only made assumptions. Speaking specifically of the study of theology, Stoner warns the university that unless it changes its view of theology, it will lose its own authority. “If the university wants to preserve or, in some instances, recover its claim to be the seat of reason, it must again treat theology as an authentic form of knowledge, constituted by reasoning about God.”<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, this faulty view of religion constrains the church when it does try to engage in the public discourse. “Lately, religion is everywhere in public, but only as a personal choice, not an authoritative guide; religion is allowed to sing and shout, but not to reason.”<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps a key reason for such ignorance is an assumption of irrelevance. “In many circles there has been a kind of spontaneous agreement between church and world that theology is dispensable. Who needs it? As one denominational executive said recently, ‘On the university level theological distinctions really don’t make any difference!’”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> James R. Stoner, “The ‘Naked’ University: What if Theology is Knowledge, Not Belief?” *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (January 1, 2006), 515.

<sup>148</sup> Stoner, “The ‘Naked’ University,” 525.

<sup>149</sup> Stoner, “The ‘Naked’ University,” 517.

<sup>150</sup> Lyman T. Lundeen, “Religious Commitments on the Campus” in Albert H. Friedlander, *Never trust a God over 30: new styles in campus ministry* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 161.



## A Core Conflict: Pluralism and Monism

Placher states that, at the core, the problem when the church seeks to influence the university community is a conflict between the assumptions of the church and the assumptions of the university; the university, along with society, assumes a pluralistic worldview, while the church assumes a monistic one. The challenge for the church, then is “the problem of how to work toward the recovery of authentic Christianity in the midst of a religiously pluralistic society.”<sup>151</sup>

That is, the Christian church is decidedly not pluralist in its theology, and so when it seeks to engage with the religiously pluralistic university, there is a fundamental conflict. Placher’s advice to churches is that they should speak and live with the recognition of their tenuous position. Just as Christians must recognize that they are part of the world yet not of it, so also Christians who are in the university community are part of the academy yet distinct from it. They have a higher calling.

## Threat of Christianity

To make matters more difficult, the church starts out with a significant disadvantage in the university community. Placher argues that Christianity is uniquely threatening to the university because of its unique role in American society and in some educational institutions. Speaking specifically of the challenges of teaching theology in pluralistic universities, he says,

Maybe it’s the residual church affiliation of a college or the survival of an institutional baccalaureate service, but we are often perceived as still holding institutional power. ... Because some form of cultural Christianity still has

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<sup>151</sup> William Carl Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 18.



this odd residual establishment status, Christian theologians seem particularly threatening to our non-Christian colleagues.<sup>152</sup>

### *Strategies for Relating the Church and the University*

Given these significant challenges, pursuing the goal of church-based ministry in the academic world obviously raises the question of how a church can do so in effective and appropriate ways. Following are several of the strategies stated in the literature.

#### *Taking Two Different Roles in Looking at the Same Phenomenon*

McGrath argues that science and religion ought to work on the same issues but they should do so in different ways; they study the same phenomena in the same world but from different perspectives. As long as they take their unique approaches, he says, problems should not occur. “Scientific and religious explanations can thus supplement each other. The problems start when scientists get religious or theologians scientific.”<sup>153</sup>

To make his point, he offers two illustrations. The first illustration focuses on the phenomenon of a cake. Science can give an analysis of the cake itself, but that is very different than understanding the purpose of the cake, a realm better left to others to consider. The second illustration focuses on music. Science can analyze a symphony, but it will fail to grasp how the music moves the listener, a task better left to non-scientific thinking. In a similar way, science can explain *how* the world works while theology can address *why* it works.

#### *Finding Analogies Rather than Identifying the “Right” View*

One of the problems in bringing a religious perspective into the conversations of the academic world, even when they are distinguished from the natural perspective,

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<sup>152</sup> Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, 11.

<sup>153</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths: Building Bridges to Faith Through Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 114.

occurs when different religions make incompatible claims about the same phenomenon. To handle that problem, some people argue that each religion must give up its claim to any truthfulness, thus removing the problem of contradictions. "...[T]he main trends of history, the major currents which pulse through our time and bear us towards the future, are inexorably pluralist in tendency. They promote a multifaceted awareness rather than securing the unchallenged dominance of any one religious way of seeing things."<sup>154</sup>

Tracy argues for a similar approach though with a greater place for maintaining one's own view of the truth. That is, he argues for pursuing the truth in one's own religion while also having an openness and an expectation for new ideas as well as deep similarities in other religions. Building on what he sees as Christianity's "always-already, not-yet" character, he says that Christians and those of other religions should be open to dialogue, and they should expect to discover analogs between seemingly incompatible traditions. These traditions should each be allowed to speak in the context of multiple voices. "The particularity of each tradition will gain in intensity as its own focal meaning becomes clearer to itself and others, as its ordered relationships for the whole come more clearly into analogical view."<sup>155</sup>

As such, according to these writers, when religion enters the context of the university, the goal should be to find the analogies between religions and life experiences and to celebrate those connections even when the individual claims are seemingly incompatible.

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<sup>154</sup> Chris Arthur. *Religious Pluralism: A Metaphorical Approach* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2000), 1.

<sup>155</sup> Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 450.

## Engaging Humbly and Empathetically

Other writers, while less inclined toward the more pluralistic stance of Arthur and Tracy, still call for a constructive dialogue. Whatever level of agreement is or is not found in the intersection between the university and the church, these authors focus on the attitude of those who engage in them. For example, Graham expresses the necessity of engaging in evangelism in the university setting with a mixture of boldness and humility, and a mixture of meekness and confidence in the truth. "The task [of evangelizing the university] will be accomplished by the Truth of Christ spoken in the Love of Christ, by humble learners whose Master is Lord of all."<sup>156</sup>

Taking the perspective of missionary work in general, Rheenen describes two very different strategies employed by different missionaries: Identificationism versus Extractionism. Extractionism is an approach that is quite limited in its connection with the target population. The missionary is physically relocated to be among the people who are to be reached, but otherwise he or she is unchanged. Identificationism, on the other hand, involves a far deeper connection in which the missionary identifies with the people:

Physical conformity, sometimes called "outer identification," should therefore not be equated with "inner identification," the heartfelt empathy discussed in this chapter.<sup>157</sup>

Missionary identification, then, is *an empathy between communicants involving a compassionate, interpersonal, reciprocal sharing of feelings and concepts*. [emphasis his]<sup>158</sup>

Rheenen clearly endorses identificationism as the superior approach.

"Identificationism is the most demanding yet most rewarding type of ministry."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Charles Habib Malik. *The Two Tasks* (Wheaton IL: EMIS, 2000), 24.

<sup>157</sup> Malik. *The Two Tasks*, 71.

<sup>158</sup> Malik. *The Two Tasks*, 69.

<sup>159</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 73.

From this perspective, Christians seeking to bring the Gospel to higher education should

enter a field humbly, taking the role of learners<sup>160</sup>

regard nationals [that is, members of the academy] as equals<sup>161</sup>

learn the language of the local people<sup>162</sup>

teach in ways people can understand ... they use indigenous categories of thought ... adjust their teaching methodologies to fit local patterns of learning and reasoning.<sup>163</sup>

personalize their ministry ... to develop personal relationships with nationals.<sup>164</sup>

Buttrick discusses the right way for the church to hold to absolute truth. First, however, he describes the wrong way that sometimes happens. "The church has sometimes assumed that it has final truth, with right to impose it."<sup>165</sup> According to Buttrick, rather than inviting people to see the truthfulness of its message, the church has at times demanded agreement, an approach that rarely is helpful, especially in the university setting. Furthermore, the church has at times had a positivism and certainty that are not warranted. And even when the certainty is warranted, the church has often held it the wrong way. In fact, Buttrick comes to the defense of the academic community when it resists this lesser approach of the church:

This dogmatism has been accompanied by a moralism.... Thus we may claim validity for the church's creeds. But by that same token they are to be offered, not imposed.<sup>166</sup>

All of this is written in partial defense of the characteristic attitude of higher education toward the Bible and the church. A creed and, still more, a

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<sup>160</sup> Rheenan, *Missions*, 59.

<sup>161</sup> Rheenan, *Missions*, 59.

<sup>162</sup> Rheenan, *Missions*, 60.

<sup>163</sup> Rheenan, *Missions*, 60.

<sup>164</sup> Rheenan, *Missions*, 60.

<sup>165</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 5.

moralistic code of conduct can never cover the new situation in our ever-developing world. Besides, a creed or code grants little power to the man who would keep it and may only anger the man resolved not to keep it; and it has perhaps too little to say to the man who has self-accusingly broken it, though in that regard a creed is far better than a code.<sup>167</sup>

So higher education should resist indoctrination but might remember that, if there is no 'live option' to secularism, secularism itself may become a dogmatism.<sup>168</sup>

### Being the Church in the Academic World

Other writers focus on bringing the presence of the church into the academic world. The Center for the Study of Campus Ministry argues that the key tasks of those charged with mission to the academic community are to bring the church into that setting while also challenging the church to take seriously the issues and concerns of the academic world:

We take it that it is the duty of those whom the church sends into this environment to make the life of the church effective and visible in that place. And from that place, we expect those who are sent to challenge the sending church to understand and respond to insights and interpretations of the human condition and prospect which emerge in the institutions of learning.<sup>169</sup>

In the academic community, these ministers should minister to all individuals in that setting, not just Christians, providing what the academic setting does not. They should also serve as "loving critics"<sup>170</sup> of the institution, calling it to fulfill its highest purposes. "This publication laments the reality that often the church has sought a much smaller goal: protecting the Christians who happen to be in that community. Orthodox

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<sup>167</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 6.

<sup>168</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 6.

<sup>169</sup> Center for the Study of Campus Ministry, *The Mission of the Church in Higher Education: A Paper of the Center for the Study of Campus Ministry, December, 1976* (Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University, 1976), 10.

<sup>170</sup> Center for the Study of Campus Ministry, 13.

and pietistic traditions too often have sent workers into the world only to protect the faith and life of the Christians who are there.”<sup>171</sup>

Being the church involves being the loving presence of God in the midst of the range of people in that context.

#### Being a Christian Community, not Just a Group Speaking about Christianity

Another challenge of being the church in the midst of the academic world is the tendency of the church to be less than what God envisions for it. Hauerwas argues that the key problem is not the failure to communicate the message of the Gospel but the failure to live it out. “The biggest problem facing Christian theology is not translation but enactment.”<sup>172</sup>

Accordingly, the missing strategy for reaching out to the academic community is, “To form a community, a colony of resident aliens which is so shaped by our convictions that no one ever has to ask what we mean by confessing belief in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>173</sup>

#### Taking Seriously the Cultural Distance

Being the church in the academic community, however, is not a simple matter. Winter’s work with the World Christian Movement emphasizes the role that culture has upon the church’s effort to live out its mission. Figure 4 shows two types of cultural distance. The E-Scale emphasizes the cultural distance involved in communicating the Gospel. The P-Scale emphasizes the cultural distance involved when people who are in the target community and are interested in Christianity seek to enter into the Christian

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<sup>171</sup> Center for the Study of Campus Ministry, 10.

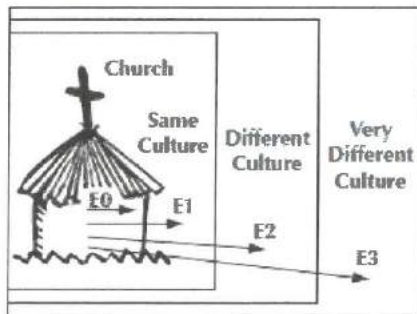
<sup>172</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 171.

<sup>173</sup> Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, 171.



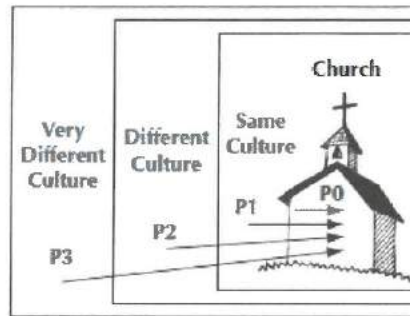
community. According to Winter, having churches whose culture is compatible with potential believers is an even larger issue than the challenge of bringing the Gospel into potential communities:

E-Scale



The E-Scale compares the cultural distances that Christians need to move in order to communicate the gospel. E0 refers to evangelism of church-going Christians. E1 is reaching one's own culture across the barrier of "church culture." E2 is cross-cultural evangelism into a similar, but different culture. E3 evangelism is taking the gospel to cultures very different from that of the messenger.

P-Scale



The P-Scale helps compare the cultural distances that potential believers need to move in order to join the nearest church. A P1 people has a culturally relevant church. A P2 people is in contact with similar cultures in which a culturally relevant church exists. The only churches a P3 people is in contact with, if any, are very foreign and composed of people very different from themselves.

**Figure 4: Cultural Distance**

Source: Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999, 532).

Thus, while there are still tens of millions who have never heard the name "Jesus" at all, there are hundreds of millions more who may have heard of Jesus and may even have high regard for Him, but who cannot see a way to become His disciples and still remain within their natural community. Standing before them are barriers ranging from the relatively trivial to the seemingly insurmountable, many of them beyond the demands of the gospel.<sup>174</sup>

Based upon Winter's reasoning, it is one thing to bring the Gospel to the academic world, and it is another thing to have a church that is culturally compatible for those people in that community who are interested in the Gospel. A key strategy of the church, then, should be to pursue cultural compatibility with these people.

<sup>174</sup> Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 532.

## Effective Preaching

One of the key aspects of church ministry and its relationship to the academic community that has received specific attention is that of preaching. According to MacNair, the church has not been effective in speaking, particularly through preaching, in the academic community:

The church appears not to have much to say to many prevailing centers of influence which formulate the policies under which we live, establish the trends of modern history, and provide the raw material out of which we fashion and criticize the patterns of our lives.

The church does not speak compellingly to the academic community. That much is certain.

[To be effective] the church leadership must know the world in which it lives, must know the Gospel through and through, and must make linkage between the two.<sup>175</sup>

One of the challenges such a preacher faces, according to MacNair, is rightly handling and including both those who are part of the “town” (those not particularly connected with the academic environment) and the “gown” (those who are). “That the minister serves the town, and a community wider than, but including the ‘gown,’ sets some conditions and poses some problems peculiar to his ministry.”<sup>176</sup>

According to MacNair, essential elements for rightly serving through preaching to those associated with the academic community as well as those not in that community requires the preacher to remember four key principles:

- 1) His call is to preach and not to lecture.
- 2) [His call] to preach is to proclaim the Gospel.
- 3) He preaches to a specific congregation.

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<sup>175</sup> Stanley MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” *Foundations* 7 (July 1964), 265.

<sup>176</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 266.



4) Preaching addresses the whole congregation.<sup>177</sup>

Elaborating on these points, he addresses the temptation to turn the sanctuary into a classroom. At the same time, the pastor must explain the Bible and theology because there is so much ignorance. Yet the reason for explaining is so that one can clearly proclaim rather than because explanation is more comfortable for academic ears than proclamation. "The temptation to win the approval of the academic portion of the congregation by adopting the tone and method of the classroom is dangerous."<sup>178</sup>

The preacher must be primarily a herald who proclaims rather than a teacher who explains and who gives greater emphasis to instruction or defense. The task is to be prophetic, speaking in God's stead rather than one who discusses what God has said.

In addition, the preacher must preach to those who are before him, not just to the student and scholar. MacNair challenges each preacher to figure out what makes his congregation unlike any other and then to preach to that unique group rather than taking the route of preaching only to a subset of the people who are gathered. Preach, he says, to the children and the grandparents, as well as to the learned and the uneducated.

In thinking about the unique aspects of the academic community, MacNair describes key issues one must consider. First of all, this is a community that lives actively in the world of thought. There are active questions in the air, and the preacher must know and understand these questions in order to be effective:

The preacher to the academic community needs to know the categories and modes in which men of intellect think as a necessary precondition to such a proclamation of the gospel of salvation as those men will understand and respect.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> MacNair, "Preaching to the Academic Community," 267.

<sup>178</sup> MacNair, "Preaching to the Academic Community," 266.

<sup>179</sup> MacNair, "Preaching to the Academic Community," 272.

To be effective in Christian witness, he must be in touch with the principal currents of thought about our world. The minister may become guide and interpreter if he himself keeps in touch.<sup>180</sup>

Key issues that MacNair saw in his day included the high value of science and empiricism, the dominance of anxiety in society, and the presence of anti-intellectualism.

In addition to understanding and addressing key issues in the academic world, the preacher must also demonstrate intellectual rigor:

Nothing so closes the mind of a hearer as to hear ignorant, half-informed or misinterpreted content delivered portentously as the word of the Lord.<sup>181</sup>

A flying visit to the study to scan a few pages, to search a concordance and to scrawl a few notes between meetings will produce no word from the Lord to a congregation living in Academia—or to any other. To read, to ponder, to compare, to pray, to wait, to write, to revise, to master, these are the avenues which converge upon a theme with power.<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, the preacher must not claim greater certainty or authority than is warranted. According to MacNair, the preacher should speak with boldness and authority when there is a solid case to be made, and with caution and openness when there is not. “Student and scholar alike will listen with gratitude to one who reserves his dogmatism for those areas where certainty prevails and sets forth his own views modestly.”<sup>183</sup>

One great value that a preacher can offer is a unified view of the world and of learning. What is more, those from the academic community will be glad to hear such a unified view since the secular university cannot offer it. “[Academia’s] members who sit under his ministry require a wholeness of world view unlikely to be sufficiently

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<sup>180</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 274.

<sup>181</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 273.

<sup>182</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 275.

<sup>183</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 274.

emphasized upon the campus. They need a principle of integration to hold together their bits and pieces of learning.”<sup>184</sup>

McGrath addresses many “modern myths” which are often held within the church as well as within the university, including the myth that is the title of his book: “intellectuals don’t need God.” He offers a guide to apologetics for those who hope to communicate effectively in the intellectual community. A major point he makes is that speakers should find the points of contact between Christian rationality and secular rationality. At the same time, speakers need to understand what it is that blocks people in the academic world from hearing and accepting the Gospel. These blocks include intellectual barriers to faith as well as the clash of worldviews between the academic community and Christianity, including both true Christianity and the worldviews commonly held by Christians. In terms of the intellectual barriers, McGrath argues that, rightly understood, there is not conflict between the faith of Christianity and a true knowledge of the world, although it is not always obvious how these two perspectives are compatible. It is the task of the Christian apologist to resolve the apparent conflicts, and McGrath offers guidance on a wide range of such issues.

Placher describes the awkwardness that is essential for those who have a prophetic voice. They are awkward in the secular academy, but they are in some sense awkward in the church as well. “...[N]one of us will make either ourselves or our neighbors very comfortable. That seems part of the job, somehow.”<sup>185</sup>

To proclaim God’s Word is to have a primary association with the crucified Christ, sometimes at odds with the academy and sometimes with a deep connection, sometimes

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<sup>184</sup> MacNair, “Preaching to the Academic Community,” 276.

<sup>185</sup> William C. Placher. “Preaching the Gospel in Academy and Society.” *Theology Today* 49, no. 1 (April 1, 1992): 20.

at odds with what society accepts as “Christian” and sometimes in alignment with it. Whether one works within a Christian environment or a secular environment, one will live “always with a bit of irony, always as uncomfortable allies who ask awkward questions just at the moment of victory.”<sup>186</sup>

Dolson also studied the challenges of preaching in a multi-generational university church. His initial hypothesis was that the major challenge of preaching effectively in a multigenerational congregation connected with the academic world would be handling the differences between the generations, such as the Boomers, Generation X that is also called the Busters, Generation Y that is also called the Millenials, and so on. To his surprise, the preachers at apparently effective university-oriented churches that he interviewed did not even mention this concern. Dolson’s conclusions are:

- University-oriented churches exist and can be effective. “Large multi-generational churches located near major universities do exist and can be growing vibrant communities of faith led by expository preachers.... They see their location as fundamental to their mission and their generational diversity as adding strength and longevity to their commitment.”<sup>187</sup>
- Expository preaching can be effective in these settings. “Expository preaching is alive and well in these university churches.”<sup>188</sup> “They have discovered that the students they are attracting want to learn what the Bible has to say and will listen to the message if it is communicated in a compelling and clear manner.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Placher, “Preaching the Gospel in Academy and Society,” 19.

<sup>187</sup> Chris Dolson, “The Challenges of Preaching to the University Church” (South Hampton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, 1999), 139.

<sup>188</sup> Dolson, “The Challenges of Preaching to the University Church,” 140.

<sup>189</sup> Dolson, “The Challenges of Preaching to the University Church,” 141.

- Challenges of preaching to the university church include: 1) The challenge of clarity. 2) The challenge of relevance. 3) The challenge of avoiding intimidation and fascination with the university setting. 4) The challenge of seeing postmodernism as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. As noted above, the challenge of preaching to different generations was not a significant concern for his participants.
- Preaching to believers and non-believers can happen simultaneously if one will preach without religious jargon and preach the truth to both seekers and believers at the same time.
- The advice from participants to those starting to preach in a university church was this: "Get to know the people in their culture as much as possible."<sup>190</sup>

### Pursuing a Richer Connection

Another direction that many have described is the pursuit of a richer connection between the church and the university. Rather than just seeing the relationship as one-sided, they have envisioned a two-way road of service and blessing.

Willimon describes, in the midst of the challenges of proclaiming the Gospel in the academic setting, key times of seeing the goodness of this pursuit:

We don't want to withdraw from the world. Where the heck would we withdraw to? I say it is all God's world and the university just doesn't yet know that. But that is our problem. The Gospel means that God is going to get back what belongs to him and he's going to do whatever is necessary to get it. There have been times when I've talked about this university as some kind of godless, secular place. Well, there have been wonderful moments when I have

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<sup>190</sup> Dolson, "The Challenges of Preaching to the University Church," 155.

been embarrassed to find out that people are asking tough, searching questions. I realize that God is unthreading all this facade we erect.<sup>191</sup>

Ker highlights this mutuality from Newman's vision of the university. While Newman specifically envisioned an approach to higher education that is formally connected with church, the reason for pursuing such a connection is the same even in secular higher education: neither religion nor learning should exist merely on its own. "Newman is vigorously pleading the case for intellectual education, not as opposed to research but as opposed to merely moral and spiritual formation."<sup>192</sup>

Hagstrom gives a fascinating image of the church not merely being tolerant of the secular university, but actually hospitable. Given significant differences in belief between the church and the university (secular or religious), the typical pattern today is toward tolerance; the differences found in the other are allowed but not valued. Instead, Hagstrom calls on the church to pursue hospitality the way one would welcome a foreign guest into one's home. That is, one must be true to oneself while also being truly welcoming to those who are different. She bases this idea in the apparent contradiction between grace and truth. Only pursuing grace would be to sacrifice one's identity as the church, while only pursuing truth misses the love of God for others. Tolerance only gives superficial attention to another's ideas; hospitality can include real engagement. Hospitality is incarnational while tolerance is detached and abstract.

Buttrick explicitly describes the mutual gifts of the church and the university. In his view, both institutions need each other. Learning alone is not enough, but faith

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<sup>191</sup> Andrew W. McThenia, "In the Strange Land of the Modern University: An Interview with William Willimon," *The Witness*, (no date given), <http://www.thewitness.org/archive/sept2000/willimon.html> (accessed December 12, 2011).

<sup>192</sup> Ian Kerr, "Newman's Idea of a University: A guide for the Contemporary University?" in David Smith and Anne Karin Langslow, ed., *The Idea of a University*, Higher Education Policy Series 51 (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999), 14.

without learning is lost too. In particular, he describes the following gifts from the university to the church:

[The university is a place where] prejudice of rank and race has been measurably overcome.

[The university exhibits a] defense of a rightful freedom.<sup>193</sup>

[The university demonstrates a good resistance to indoctrination.]

The university has sometimes been guilty of indoctrination into secularism, but it has brought gifts when it has resisted the church's lapses into proselyting and moralism.<sup>194</sup>

Perhaps the best gain for faith at the hands of secular education has been the university's insistence on truth and fact.<sup>195</sup>

Buttrick also describes a most significant gift from the church to the task of the secular university. "The faith that the cosmos is one and worthy of study is Biblical faith, against the view that would make matter a fetter, and flesh the evil work of some demiurge."<sup>196</sup>

Higton describes this needed mutuality with the provocative title, "Can the university and the church save each other?" A key problem of the church today, as he sees it, is that it aligns everything to match a practical, missional focus. The emphasis can become so pragmatic, he says, that the truth itself can be lost. "The disruptive strangeness of those sources [which he lists as doctrine, Scripture, and church history] is in danger of being hidden in the rush to use it."<sup>197</sup>

That is, doctrine and even God Himself are sometimes seen for their instrumental value more than for their inherent value. He says that the church needs to see again "the

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<sup>193</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 51.

<sup>194</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 53.

<sup>195</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 54.

<sup>196</sup> Buttrick, *Biblical Thought and the Secular University*, 56.

<sup>197</sup> Mike Higton, "Can the University and the Church Save Each Other?" *CrossCurrents* (Summer 2005), <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Cross-Currents/135241443.html> (accessed December 21, 2011).



vital uselessness of God.” That is, God’s value is primarily in His existence, not in how He can bring about the kind of change the church longs to see occur. Higton sees the university as being an institution that can help the church step out of its drive for practicality to see the truth of God for its inherent value.

Malik describes the benefits of having to defend the faith to those who are skeptical of it, a continuing activity for any church that seeks to be effective in the academic community. In his view, the university community raises the kinds of questions that the church needs to be challenged to address:

What you know, or think you know, that you cannot articulate in such a way as to share it with all mankind is not knowledge. It could be faith, it could be feeling, it could be intuition, it could be hallucination, it could be daydreaming, but it is not knowledge. It remains your private property until you manage to convert it into knowledge, namely, until you succeed in communicating it to others, indeed potentially to all mankind. Knowledge is essentially publishable and shareable with all men.<sup>198</sup>

#### Strategies to Avoid

Placher is quoted earlier in this chapter as describing the threat that Christianity is in the university community because of the unique place of influence it historically has had in American society. Because of this threat, Placher warns Christians not to make use of such privilege if it is available. “We have to keep rejecting the advantages that Christianity’s residual cultural status could provide.”<sup>199</sup>

Placher also warns against the strategy of just staying quiet. The pitfalls and challenges must not prevent Christians from having a voice. “We know there are

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<sup>198</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 17.

<sup>199</sup> Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, 19.



illegitimate ways of trying to impose a point of view, and we let that be the excuse for not thinking too much about whether there are legitimate ways to stand for something.”<sup>200</sup>

On the other hand, Placher warns against inappropriate ways to engage. “One answer is that problems arise only when a Christian voice tries to dominate. Christians should be content to be one voice among others in a pluralistic conversation.”<sup>201</sup>

Marsden similarly argues that there is significant pressure on Christians to remain quiet yet that doing so is not the right approach. “The fact is that, no matter what the subject, our dominant academic culture trains scholars to keep quiet about their faith as the price of full acceptance in that community.... Separation of faith and learning is widely taken for granted in our culture.”<sup>202</sup>

### *Missional Churches*

A few authors have specifically addressed visions of the church that are similar to the vision presented in this study of churches orienting themselves toward the university community. Wietzke describes a general vision of churches that seriously address their community whatever it might be:

Churches have to proceed out of [that is, based on the foundation of] their own self-understanding and loyalty to the gospel, but they must also proceed with an understanding of context and the people in it.<sup>203</sup>

A congregation, or a church body, without a community conscience will end up serving only itself.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Placher, “Preaching the Gospel in Academy and Society,” 18.

<sup>201</sup> Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, 165.

<sup>202</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press US, 1998), 7.

<sup>203</sup> Walter R. Wietzke, *In League with the Future*, 1980, 86.

<sup>204</sup> Wietzke, *In League with the Future*, 90.

### *University-Oriented Churches*

Addressing ministry in the academic community by means of university-oriented churches has received relatively little attention, either in the literature or seemingly also in practice. In 1963, Chamberlin published a study of interviews of people at five different university campuses about their views of the local churches in their communities. Chamberlin explicitly focused on *full service* churches, meaning churches that carried out the wide variety of church activities to meet the needs of the range of people in the community.

Chamberlin concludes that there was a lack of attention among Christians given to churches that as a whole seek to minister to the campus environment. Christians have instead sought to influence the academic world with two other important channels, while they were missing what is potentially the most significant channel:

Christian churches have been deeply concerned with higher education for many centuries. This concern has been expressed through two major channels: (1) establishing and maintaining colleges and universities, and (2) conducting religious ministries through "foundations" or "student centers" at non-church-related institutions. Both of these channels have been highly developed....

Meanwhile, at nearly every college campus in America there is a "third channel" of Christian ministry—the local parish church. This "third channel" has been given little or no attention by denominational and interdenominational agencies in their preoccupation with specialized campus ministries. And yet these local parish churches are the primary representatives of Christianity at the campus. To them come many students for Sunday worship and other programs, and in their membership are most of the faculty who identify themselves as Christians. Since what the parish church thinks, says, and does constitutes part of the total impact of Protestantism upon a campus community, the contribution of this "third channel" deserves fresh attention—and that is the purpose of this book.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> John Gordon Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1963), 8.

Unfortunately, this assessment, offered in 1963, seems just as applicable today. This book has only been cited once in the general literature since its publication, and that was by *The Idea of a Christian University in Today's World* by B.C. Fisher, in 1989, a book whose focus is on the "first channel" as identified by Chamberlin rather than the "third channel" which is the focus of his book.

Chamberlin gives ample evidence from his interviews in support of his claim that this "third channel," that is, local churches that, as a whole, specifically hope to address the campus community, had received insufficient attention. A dominant theme that Chamberlin highlights from his interviews is the intellectual weakness of the church, both in preparing students for college, and in interacting with students and faculty in the campus community. Chamberlin quotes a student who said,

The church does not involve enough challenge. So, when the student gets to college, all of a sudden all these challenges hit him at once. These very weak foundations that the churches established through Sunday school once a week, and perhaps a church camp in the summer, are for nothing when he meets an intellectual challenge—a real, sound logical argument.<sup>206</sup>

In Chamberlin's assessment, "Instead of being a community of men and women who have a solid understanding of the Christian faith, the church has often become a warm fellowship of confusion."<sup>207</sup>

Another dominant theme was the belief in the mutual irrelevance of the church and the college. According to Chamberlin,

The overwhelming testimony of the men and women visited at these five campuses was that the Christian church and the modern college have little need for each other.<sup>208</sup>

At these five campuses the ministry of the churches, foundations, and student Christian organizations was largely peripheral to the central academic work of

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<sup>206</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 82.

<sup>207</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 160.

<sup>208</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 131.

the campus. Churches did not try to influence the colleges; colleges did not expect to be influenced by the churches. Instead of a conscious and clear Christian ministry to, or encounter with, the whole life and work of the campus, the dominant view... was mutual peripherality.<sup>209</sup>

Most pastors, like their parishioners, considered the responsibility of the Christian church to higher education to be peripheral to the primary mission of the parish.<sup>210</sup>

By viewing theology as a responsibility separate from the general life of church or campus, these answers reflect something of the antitheological mood of much of American Protestantism. The roots of this mood are many, but they include: (a) a pragmatic frame of mind among Americans that is more concerned with observable consequences, behavior, and practical results than with theory, principle, or meaning; (b) the conviction that Christianity is a matter of the heart rather than of the head, as shown in the central place that "evangelism" and revivalism have had in American Protestantism; and (c) a general anti-intellectualism growing from the egalitarian strain in American culture that resists the idea that the intellectual aristocracy deserves any special considerations—that in fact is suspicious of intellectuality.<sup>211</sup>

In terms of the responsibility of a church to the campus, Chamberlin says, "The most obvious opportunity to express the illuminative function [of the church] comes to the parish church in the ministry to its own members who are administrators or teachers at the college."<sup>212</sup>

That is, the church should ensure that its own members have a rich understanding of theology and that they have practice in applying theology to the assumptions and practices of life. In that way, both students and professors will be in better positions to relate their faith to their fields of study as well as to their colleagues.

To be effective in leading this kind of ministry, Chamberlin identifies several key factors. First, they must be close to the academic world in multiple ways:

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<sup>209</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 131.

<sup>210</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 133.

<sup>211</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 156.

<sup>212</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 169.

Discovering where a person is requires the pastor to go there too—not only geographically (as in calling in the home or dormitory), but psychologically, theologically, aesthetically, and intellectually.<sup>213</sup>

Parish churches near the campus have a special opportunity—a demanding responsibility—to minister with faculty. Faculty, as men and women devoted to the life of scholarship, are largely isolated from the church and often from the community in which they live. The churches, represented by the clergy and by others who may be competent, must leave their churchly precincts and enter the arduous and exacting world of scholarly struggle.<sup>214</sup>

Second, they must be open to learn, and to the risk that such openness entails:

In such a relationship (of pastoral ministry to people in the university), learning is mutual. If the pastor is open to discern the situation of the person, he is also open to learn from the person.... The pastoral office offers both opportunities and danger, for if the pastor is genuinely open to another, so that his faith can be expressed authentically, he is at the same time open enough to have to share the contingencies of uncertainty and doubt.<sup>215</sup>

To many church members and church leaders this open, flexible approach to church life [that is essential for engaging the campus community] is threatening. They want security more than honesty, observable results more than integrity, success more than understanding of what God in Christ is saying to his church in the world of learning. But there are some who dare to try new ways, who are willing to risk failure in their effort to trust that God is seeking through his disciples to reconcile the world of the intellect to himself.<sup>216</sup>

Third, they must demonstrate intellectual rigor and integrity. Chamberlin quotes one campus administrator who believes that local pastors need to have a significant breadth of knowledge and understanding in order to be able to speak in a way that is meaningful to a wide range of faculty and students. Unfortunately, according to this administrator, few pastors are so prepared:

I'm afraid, from my point of view, we have only a small percentage of ministers who bring this sort of competence to the parish.... I think, frankly, for the identification of the campus-area church with the faculty, with the way

<sup>213</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 178.

<sup>214</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 184.

<sup>215</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 179.

<sup>216</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 185.

pastors are now chosen, the only hopeful way I now see is for him to have the individual pastoral identification.<sup>217</sup>

Speaking of the required qualifications of a pastor, another administrator said,

It seems to me the church near the campus, if it is to serve an expanding campus population, should first of all be concerned with seeing that it acquires an intellectual, academically oriented pastor. If it is going to assume that responsibility, that is its very first obligation, its prerequisite for any kind of success.... It seems to me the more distinguished a mind the individual has, the more successful he is as a campus pastor.<sup>218</sup>

Of the faculty that he interviewed, Chamberlin says, "The majority of the teachers were seriously critical of the churches for their failure to provide a relevant and intellectually respectable ministry to the campus."<sup>219</sup>

For example, one faculty member offered this assessment: "I don't think that many ministers are really well-trained... This seems to mean that by and large ministers are not prepared to minister on an adequate intellectual level to university or college people."<sup>220</sup>

One summarized his view of what kind of person should be minister in a university-oriented church with these words:

A person who is at home in the intellectual climate, who has been trained in a theological community in which students can study with good minds in science or philosophy and wrestle with these ideas whether they support their theology or not. It is this which gives the person the ability to speak in a context, or in a way, that gives him a hearing with intellectual people. My goodness, the gospel can be presented in so many different ways without insult to somebody's intelligence. I listen to some sermons and I feel insulted, and yet I will go because I feel as a Christian I go to a church also to worship, not just to hear a brilliant lecture. So I'll accept it, but I don't think it would attract anyone.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 57.

<sup>218</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 58.

<sup>219</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 75.

<sup>220</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 76.

<sup>221</sup> Chamberlin, *Churches and the Campus*, 76.



Montgomery specifically studied the challenge of having a church that seeks to minister to people both in the university setting (the “gown”) and those outside of it (the “town”). He presents a vision of integrating these two groups of people in a single, united worshipping community. A key aspect of this unified community is that they participate in central church ministries (which he identifies as the sacraments) together, rather than in a “separate but equal” approach. He quotes Clifford J. Swanson in describing the vision of such a church in this way: “A theology of the church which can affirm the existence of the community of faith in the midst of the community of learning in such a way as to allow for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to become operative reality in both areas.”<sup>222</sup>

Montgomery found many tensions including what he calls “student sins” (e.g., parties), culture (e.g., hair length), anti-intellectualism in the church and progressivism in the academy, and the apparent conflict between the church on the one side and science and evolution on the other. Montgomery sees these tensions as separating “town” and “gown,” a separation which leads to a weakened community:

Generally speaking, the result of these tensions and divisions has been a lack of contact with one another: student and townsperson; campus and town; or church and university. And the consequences of this lack of contact has often been decreasing communication, or at least a mutual unwillingness to listen or speak in encouraging tones and the loss of genuine relationships and sense of mutuality.<sup>223</sup>

In contrast, Montgomery calls for

- One community: Being together as one body in Christ, yet recognizing differences and subgroups

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<sup>222</sup> William D Montgomery, “A Study of Ministry in a Town-Gown Setting” (master’s thesis, Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1981), 51.

<sup>223</sup> Montgomery, “A Study of Ministry in a Town-Gown Setting,” 30.



- One mission: Coming to terms with the relationship between town and gown, when which gets priority, when they'll be treated the same, and so on
- One Ministry: Recognizing the core commonality of all people

Montgomery argues that the benefits of a unified approach to ministry, including both town and gown, is better than seeking to address the two groups separately:

The study asked: should they aim at encouraging parishes to form student groups, or should it call students into service in the total life and mission of the congregation? The conclusions indicated that: (a) congregations are best served by full integration of the students into the congregation; (b) the congregation should conduct rich and exciting worship experiences; (c) the congregation should come alive and become fully functional in mission; and (d) campus ministry should assist the parish ministers in the enlistment of students in the life and ministry of their congregation.<sup>224</sup>

### Summary

In summary, this literature review has studied what has been written that would guide a university-oriented church. The core problem, as described in the literature, is the divide between two realms: the realm of faith and the realm of knowledge. Unfortunately the church has for too long tolerated this division, a tolerance that has led to a loss of presence and witness in the academic world as well as a weakened faith and life in the church itself.

The mission of the church is to bridge this gap. Several strategies have been identified. The approach selected by this study is for the church to go to the secular academic environment with the Gospel. With this missional approach, there are various ways in which individuals (e.g., campus ministers and faculty) or subsets of the church (e.g., parachurch ministries) can be the means by which it seeks to influence people within higher education.

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<sup>224</sup> Montgomery, "A Study of Ministry in a Town-Gown Setting," 24.

The vision of a university-oriented church focuses on how the church as a whole can be the means by which the Gospel is brought into the academic world. The literature describes two broad strategies for such churches: be the church within the academic community, and be a proclaiming community in that setting.

In terms of being the church, many have written about the need to identify with the people in the academic community rather than simply being near them. The church must seek to be culturally compatible, meaning that they are intentionally hospitable to those to whom the church seeks to proclaim the truth as well as to those from the academic world who may seek out the church. The church must seek to find both the surface and the deep connections between the ideas and values of the church and the academic world. Furthermore, the church should seek mutuality with the university community, expecting to learn from and be served by that community while also seeking to teach and to serve.

In terms of proclaiming, many have written about the need to demonstrate intellectual rigor while not turning the sermon into a lecture. Preaching must lead with thinking, but it must never merely be explanation or defense. It is proclamation, speaking in God's stead instead of merely stating and explaining what God has said. It is an appeal to the whole being. In addition, preaching must be both bold and humble, never demanding or forcing acceptance while also not merely pointing the way. It is to be a bold appeal to bring about change, an appeal that is made from a sound mind and a vibrant soul. The church is to be humble while also being proactive and unashamed. While the university community has greater sensitivity to lack of intellectual rigor than

some other parts of society, what it demands and needs is actually not any different at the core: relevant, biblical preaching with integrity.

Unfortunately the church as a whole has given relatively little attention to the academic world, a world of great need and significance. Such ministry has few strong examples, yet there are a few examples that demonstrate that such an approach can be done well.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **METHODS AND INTERVIEW DATA**

This chapter describes the process for data collection as well as a detailed analysis of those data. Chapter 5 describes the conclusions drawn from this material.

#### **Method for Data Collection**

Based upon the selection process described in Chapter 1, thirteen different interviews were conducted representing eleven different churches. Seven of the interviews were conducted in person, while the other six were conducted using telephone and Skype. The researcher personally visited eight of the eleven churches.

In two cases, multiple people participated in the interview. Having multiple people in an interview was given as an option when the interviews were scheduled. The first multiple-person interview included the founding pastor and his wife, an elder from the church who was also a faculty member in the local academic institution, and a part time staff member of the church who was also a graduate of the local school. The second interview including multiple people involved the senior pastor and an associate pastor.

Eight of the churches that were studied included interviews with the senior pastor (of these eight, one was a retired senior pastor and another was an interim). The three other churches were represented only by associate or college ministries pastors and a long-term senior elder. Of the thirteen people interviewed, two were women. The specific people interviewed were chosen based upon the recommendation of the senior pastor. That is, the senior pastor was invited to participate or to suggest someone else who could speak on behalf of the overall leadership of the church from a historical perspective.

As noted, two interviews were conducted for each of two of the churches. The reasons for these occurrences were, first, to include both the college ministries pastor and the senior pastor since they were not available at the same time, and second, to include a long time though retired pastor as well as current leadership in that church.

Participants were given the questions ahead of time to prepare if they so chose, though responses were only gathered verbally. The interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes each, were recorded and later transcribed.

### **Clarification of Purposes**

This research is a study of the responses of individuals within a small number of diverse churches over a range of issues. As such, there are several things that this research cannot do. First, it cannot and does not offer claims of predictability with statistical significance. Too few churches were included to make defensible generalizable statements. Rather, the goal was to explore case studies that would help develop an understanding of key issues of concern for university-oriented church ministry.

Second, this study is not an analysis of individual churches. The results are reported horizontally (that is, question by question) rather than vertically (that is, church by church). In addition, very few people were interviewed from each church (usually just one person), and the observations of these people were not verified by interviewing additional people in each of these churches. Furthermore, this study was based on a self-reported snapshot of these churches. Some of the respondents reported that the church was going through a time of re-examining key elements of their vision and how they lived it out. Descriptions of the churches and their responses are given in the past tense, not to suggest that the churches are no longer like what was reported, but to reflect the

fact that the data were drawn from a single point in time. The goal was to gain an understanding of the key issues of concern rather than to be able to make assessments about the current or future effectiveness of ministry in each church.

What this study does do is to provide a window, from the perspective of people in church leadership, into the experiences, perspectives, and decisions of churches that were identified as being university-oriented churches. As such, it steps into the messiness of real church ministry and seeks to learn more about the deep issues that were at work.

### **Process for Analysis**

As mentioned above, what follows is a horizontal description of the responses to each question rather than a vertical description of each church. That is, each question is taken in order, and all of the responses for that question are taken together. There are two reasons for this process. First, the respondents were offered anonymity so that they could freely respond to the questions without concern for what people would think of them or their responses, either from within their own church or from outside. One respondent specifically highlighted the parts of his responses that needed to be kept not only anonymous (that is, unnamed) but also confidential (that is, not reported at all). Most of the responses, however, were not sensitive yet confidentiality has been maintained because of that initial agreement. There is one exception, and that is the description of a key part of the history of one church (see the end of this chapter). The story that the respondent told is very significant in terms of understanding the vision of their church, and the telling of the story would make the identity of the church relatively transparent. Aside from this exception, doing a horizontal analysis of the responses makes it

impossible to piece together the identities of particular respondents and churches as a vertical analysis would.

The second reason for taking a horizontal analysis is to compare and contrast responses on particular items rather than doing an analysis of individual churches. The approach for this research is to create a virtual conversation among respondents about related issues. As such, their varied responses to each question are brought together to highlight the similar and dissimilar perspectives on each one. Consistent with the metaphor of creating a virtual conversation, respondents' own words are used in this analysis as much as possible.

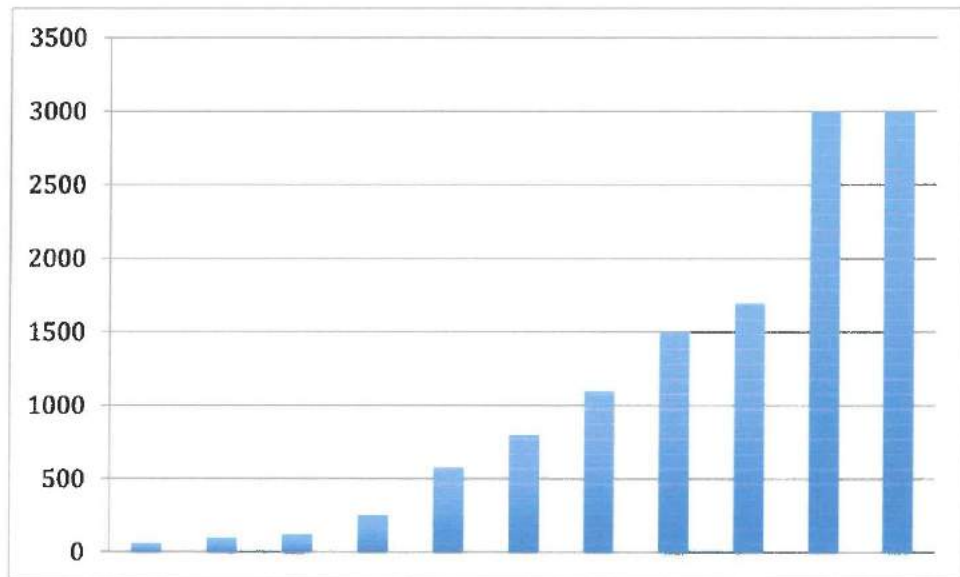
### **Summary Description of Churches Included**

The goal for the selection of churches for inclusion in this study was to include churches that reportedly embodied the vision of a university-oriented church while also reflecting a range of churches on multiple dimensions. In particular, the goal was to include churches that represented variation in size, age, ethnic makeup, denomination, and geographic location. Again, the goal was not to have enough churches in the study to achieve statistical significance or to be able to make claims about churches in each of these categories. Rather, the goal was to learn from churches that represented a range of congregations on these dimensions so as to reduce the likelihood of getting responses that reflected only a narrow slice of university-oriented churches. The demographics of churches are not identified when the answers of the respondents are described so as to preserve their anonymity and because the apparent correlation that such reporting might imply would not be reliable.



The following graphs depict the range of churches included in this study on these various categories.

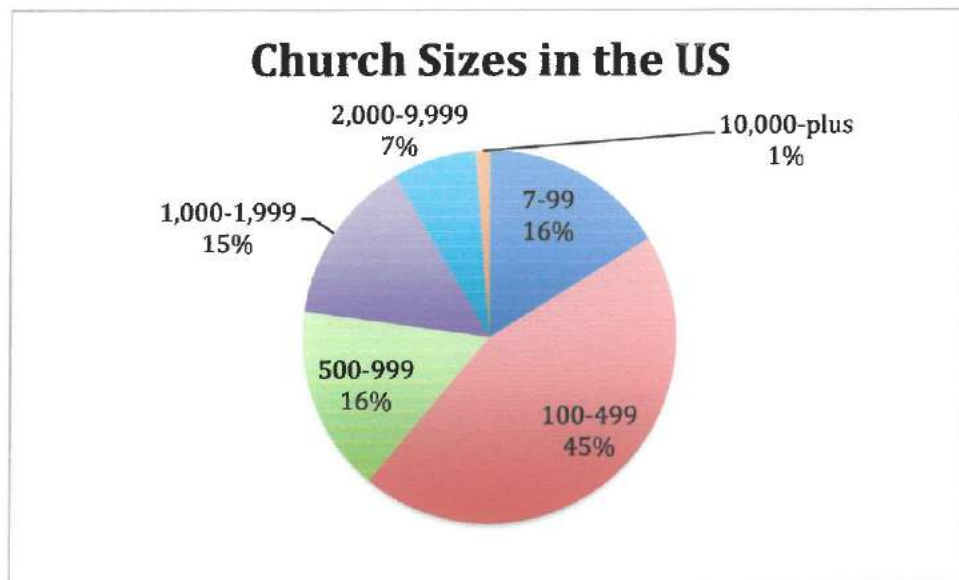
*Size (Average Sunday Attendance During “High Season”)*



**Figure 5: Average Sunday Attendance**

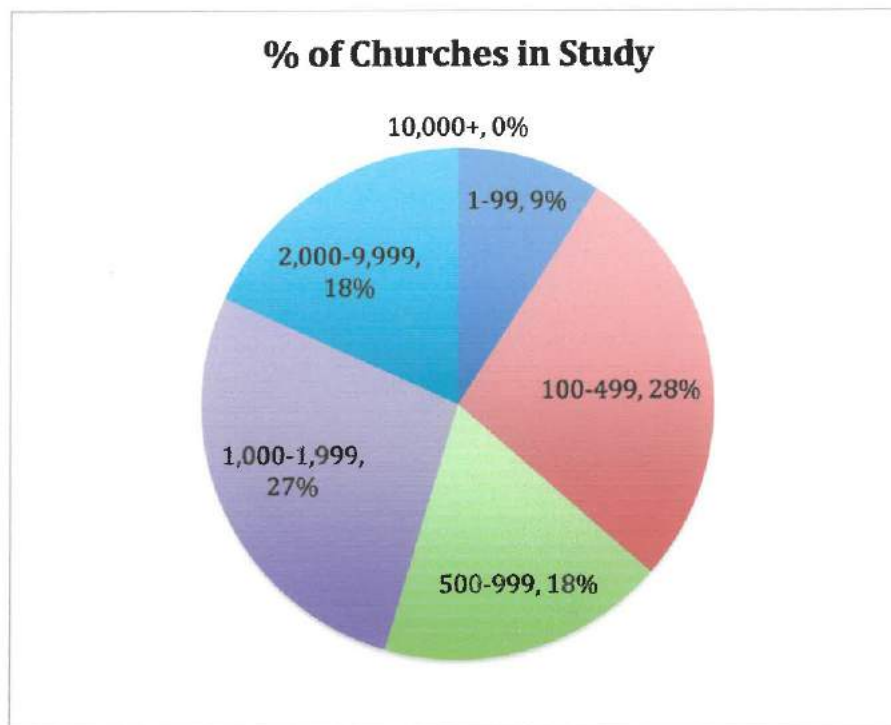
The smallest churches reported fewer than 100 people on an average Sunday and the two largest churches reported around 3,000. These data can be compared to this national study<sup>1</sup> of places of worship in the United States, a study that included churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship.

<sup>1</sup> National Congregations Study, [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html#sizecong](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong) (accessed November 21, 2011).



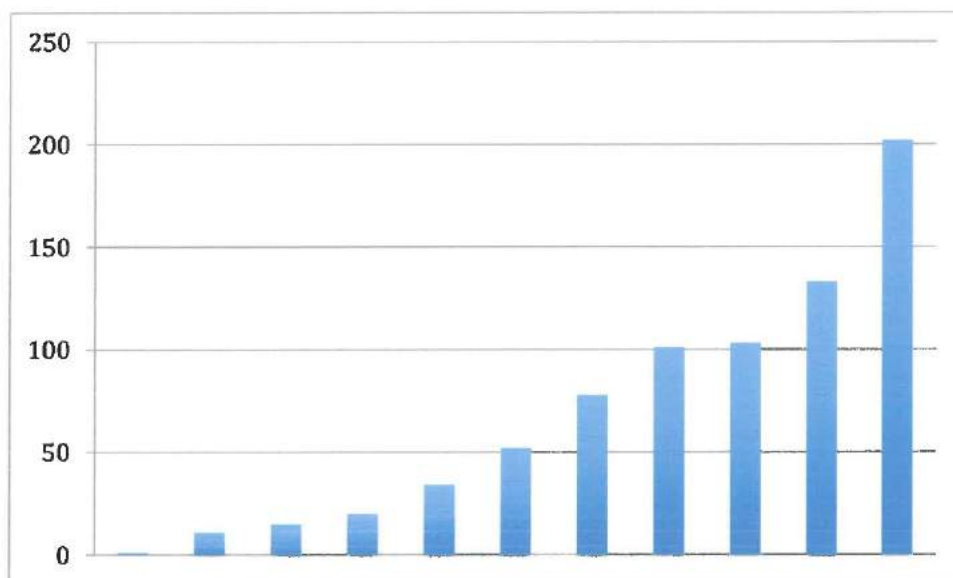
**Figure 6: Distribution of Church Sizes in the US**

As such, the present study included a size range that covers close to 99% of the congregations in the United States. Figure 7 shows the distribution of the sizes of churches in this study. Note that these churches are weighted toward the larger churches. Being toward the higher end of the size range is not surprising because the cities and towns that have significant academic communities would be expected to be larger because of the presence of the school itself as well as the fact that most of these churches had more than one higher education institution within its community.



**Figure 7: Distribution of Church Sizes in this Study**

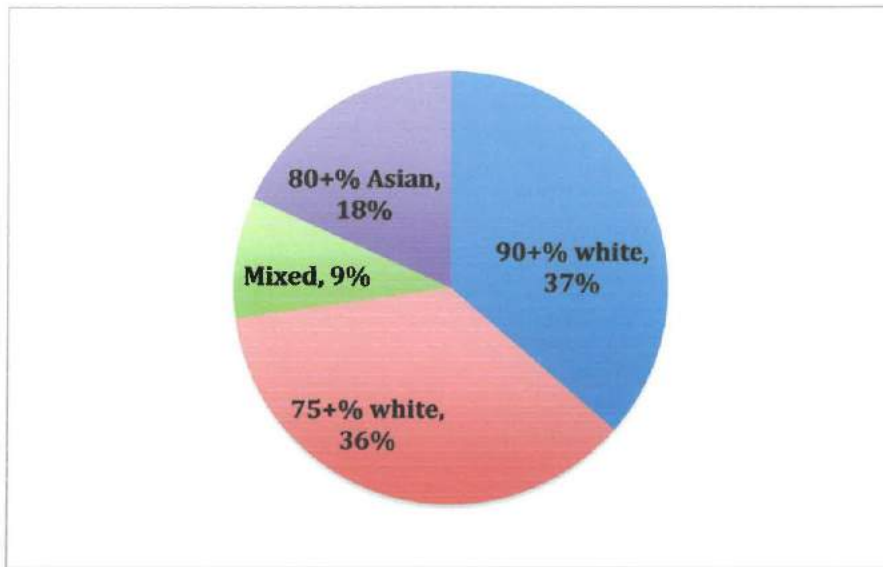
*Age of the Church (in Years)*



**Figure 8: Age of the Churches (in Years)**

The ages of the churches included in this study covers the range of ages of almost every church in the United States, from less than a year (the apparently missing bar at the left end of the chart) to over 200 years old.

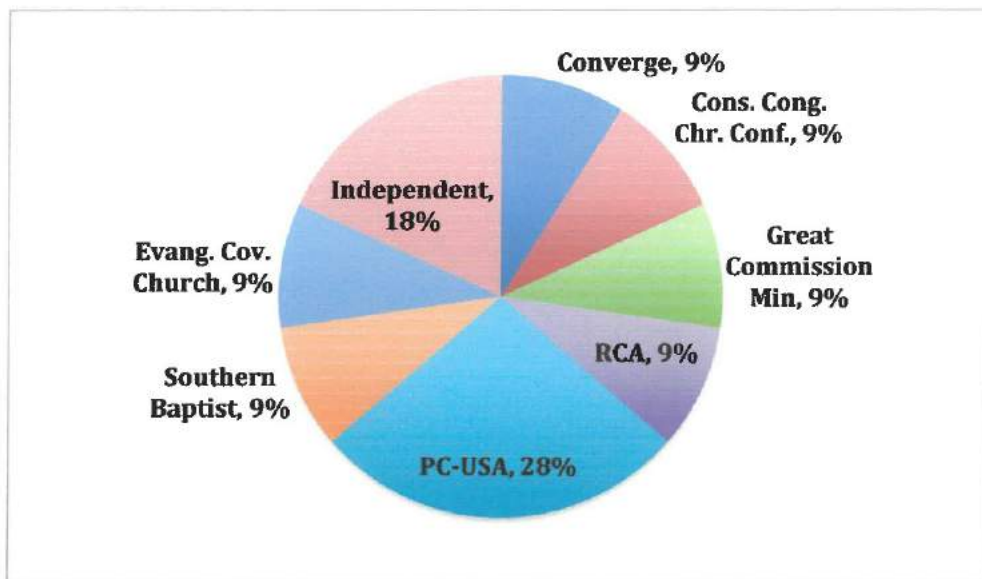
### *Ethnic Makeup*



**Figure 9: Ethnic Makeup of Churches**

Roughly a third of the churches in this study were almost entirely white, with roughly another third being largely white yet with significant minority populations. One church, listed as the “mixed” church in the chart, was less than 70% white and roughly 20% Asian American. Two churches were predominantly Asian American. Certainly a variety of issues might have led to this inclusion of more predominantly white churches than any other ethnicity as well as the fact that the only dominant ethnic category other than White was Asian American, although those issues are not obvious. An intentional effort was made to include churches that are predominantly an ethnic group other than White so as to reduce any effect from focusing specifically upon White congregations.

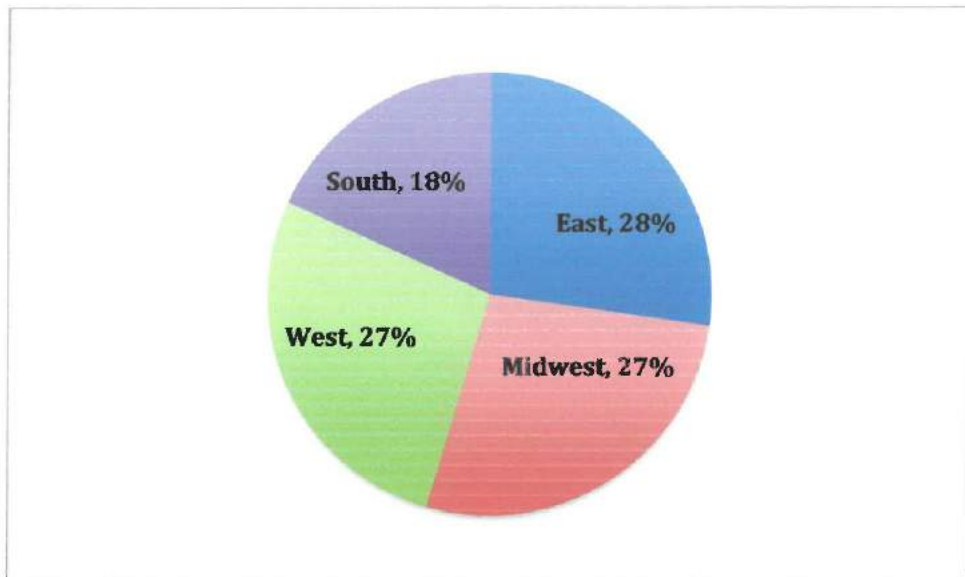
## *Denomination*



**Figure 10: Denominations of Churches**

One goal of identifying churches for this study was to be sure that various denominations were selected. On the other hand, no particular denomination was intentionally pursued. Since networking was one of the means used to identify churches, it is not surprising to have multiple churches in a single denomination (PC-USA), although one of those three churches was identified independently of the other two. In addition, it is expected that some denominations might have a greater emphasis on university orientation, possibly for theological and/or practical reasons. Yet that issue was not a part of the research focus for this study, so no conclusions should be drawn from the representation of different denominations shown here.

### *Geographic Location*

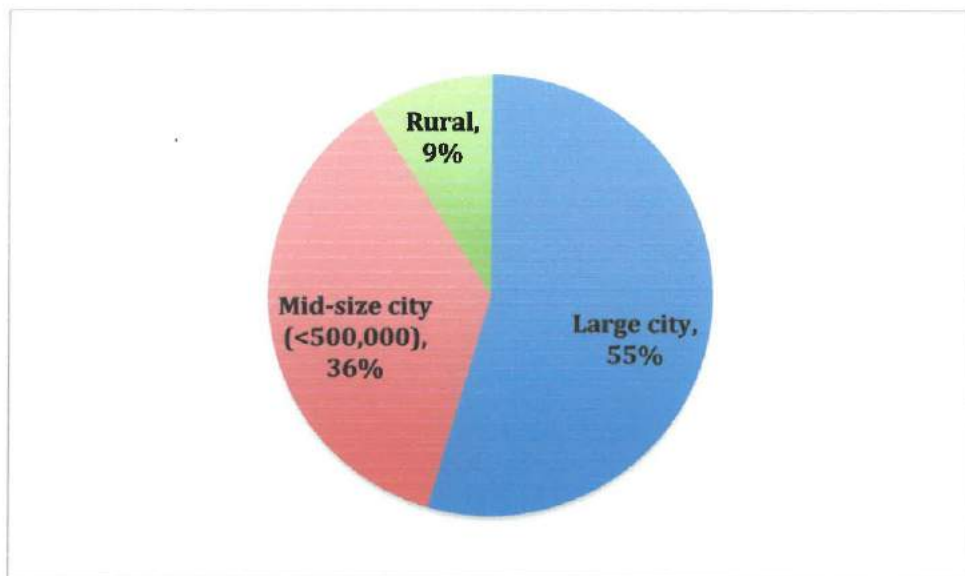


**Figure 11: Geographic Distribution of Churches**

This chart reflects the effort to include churches from various parts of the country.

The goal is to reduce any possible correlation with regional variations.

### *Size of City*



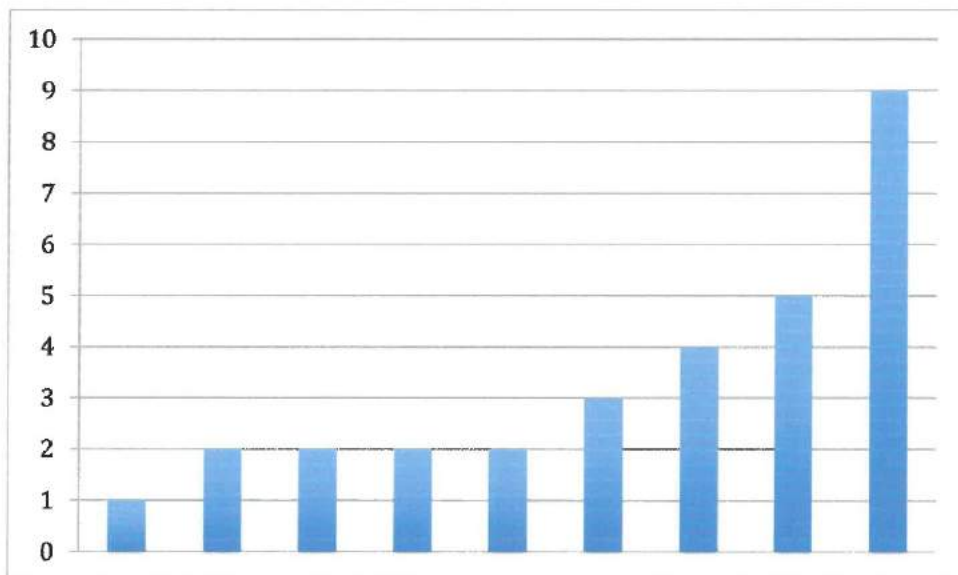
**Figure 12: Size of Home Communities for Churches**



Only one of the churches included was in a rural community while the others came from mid-size or large cities. Several respondents described the influence that the culture of the surrounding community had upon their ministries. It would be expected that there would be a correlation between the culture of the community and the culture of the university or universities within that community. However, that interaction was not a focus of this study, so unless specifically expressed by the participants, the size of the community in which the church was located is not specified with their responses.

#### *Distance from Church to the Dominant School*

The following chart depicts the walking time in minutes from the church to the closest part of the most dominant university campus for 9 of the 11 schools represented in this study. Obviously these churches were very close to campus.



**Figure 13: Walking Time from Campus to Church (Minutes)**

The other two churches were significantly farther away. One was approximately 7 miles away and would take roughly 15 minutes to drive to the closest living spaces on campus. It was clearly in a distinct community from campus, yet the respondent reported



that its distance was not a significant barrier for students in this community. In fact, the respondent said, “We realized [that when] we moved seven miles off campus that we began attracting more college students than we had ever attracted [when we were much closer] which was very counter intuitive. You would think that being this far away you might not be able to do that, but it can be done.”<sup>2</sup>

The other church that was beyond walking distance to campus was in the heart of a metropolitan area in which using the subway was an accepted part of the culture. It was about a 15-minute ride to church from three dominant universities, less time to some smaller schools, and more to many others. The respondent from this church expressed the belief that this distance was not a hindrance to people in their community.

### **Interview Questions**

What follows is a question-by-question description of the responses of interviewees. An analysis of the data is included here and the conclusions are included in Chapter 5.

#### *Reaction to the Definition of a University-Oriented Church*

The actual question was listed like this: “Reaction to the definition: What is your reaction to the attached definition of a university-oriented church? Would you change it in any way?” As a reminder, here is the definition that was given to participants, “A university-oriented church (as defined by this study) is a multi-generational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, interview by author, between April and September, 2011.

Everyone expressed agreement with the definition. The most positive responses were, “I love the definition!”<sup>3</sup> “That captures our church.”<sup>4</sup> “That captures it well.”<sup>5</sup> The least enthusiastic responses were, “That is a helpful, functional definition.”<sup>6</sup> “That is okay.”<sup>7</sup>

Four of the eleven people volunteered that this description matched their church vision, though that was not part of the question. One participant expressed appreciation that the definition was more *holistic* than most definitions of university-oriented churches. One expressed appreciation that it showed that a university-oriented church is something more than just having a college ministry. And finally, one participant expressed appreciation for the idea of *movement* toward the university community.

Suggested revisions included:

- Wanting to work out the details to fully understand it
- Adding the “reverse flow” of how the university can be a benefit to the church
- Adding “racial” as another dimension for movement toward the university community

### *Target Community of the Church*

The question was listed like this:

Target community: Describe the primary target population for this church.

- A. College students connected with the college/university community
- B. All of the people connected with the college/university community

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<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, interview.

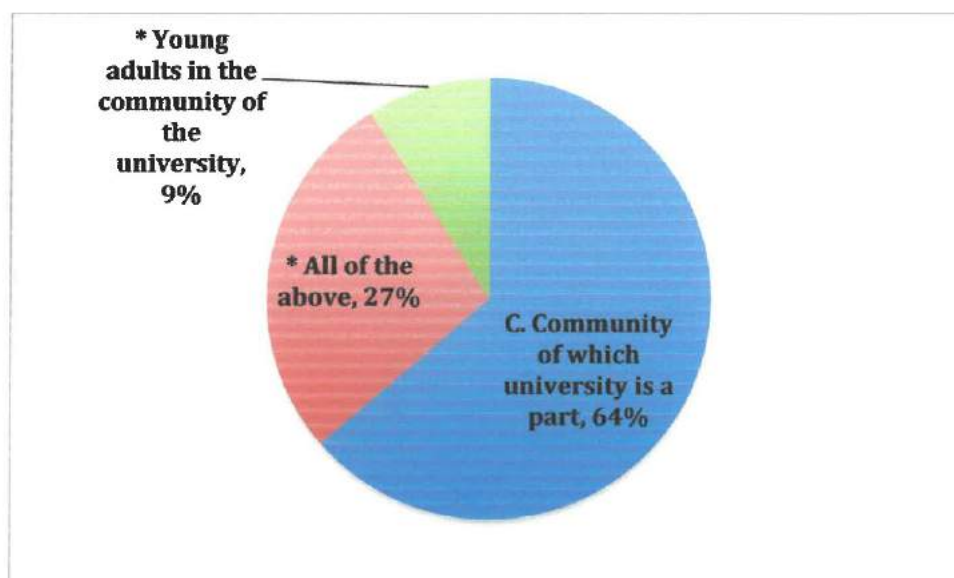
<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, interview.

- C. The community in which the college/university is located
- D. Other

Figure 14 summarizes people's responses to this question. Note that no one answered A) College students or B) University people. It should not be surprising that A) was not selected because churches were selected for this study that were known for being multi-generational rather than just being a student church. It is a little more surprising that none of the responses included B), but again the multi-generational focus made such a response unlikely. Four respondents added their own options to this question. These responses are marked with \*.



**Figure 14: Target Community of the Church**

Those who answered C) Community offered a number of additional explanations including the following:

I personally think I would go with C), recognizing that the community's very much impacted by the college and hospital. So sort of in a way it's inseparable. But the broad community is the target.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous, interview.

[If we were] to say, 'We only want college people or people associated with the college.' ... actually, I almost feel philosophically that there might even be a problem with that, for the church is broader than that.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the church that was over 200 years old actually predated most of the academic institutions in its area, yet its original vision was to reach something comparable to the academic community, so the respondent chose C) with the qualification that the university community was clearly a part of its vision.

One participant explained that the community they were trying to reach was not really defined by the university. The church was located very close to campus and as such did not really have a physical neighborhood of which it was a part. Rather, its target community included the neighbors of the people in the congregation, wherever they lived. Where the people were connected, that was where the church was connected.

Another church was described as being specifically intergenerational, and the respondent said that probably families received a higher emphasis of ministry resources than students.

Those who created their own category of "All of the above" offered explanations including the following:

- One explained that bridging the campus and the community was the explicit vision of the church, so it only made sense to include all of these categories.
- One expressed that the church was in the process of reemphasizing its original vision that was more heavily weighted toward the university.
- Another respondent said, "Clearly [the church] is a church that's much broader than just [the university community], so if I was [sic] speaking to the whole

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, interview.

church, I wouldn't say that the university community is the only community that we're seriously targeting but it is the most distinctive community that we're trying to target."<sup>10</sup>

- Another respondent described how the original vision had to broaden as demographics shifted. That is, originally the vision was just to reach undergraduate students, but then it broadened to include graduate students, staff, and faculty. Then, as other people became connected with the church who were outside these groups, the target population became even broader, including the larger community of which the church was a part.
- Another respondent described the opposite shift of the target population of the vision. The church started as all college students and then had seen the demographics shift to included people who were not students. Ironically, they then had to choose to increase their focus on attracting and retaining college students. In the words of the respondent,

I think that over time it's actually shifted a little bit in that like at the beginning it was 100% college students reaching another group and over time as people have graduated and many have stayed I think there is a more intentional focus now actually than at the beginning of reaching out to college students as a discrete [group] ... since now we aren't all college students. I think it now makes more sense to talk about reaching out to them. But I think it's always been within the context of university students being part of the whole context in which we live and wanting to minister to the whole context, and in [this city] inevitably that means being very serious about college students. That's such a huge part of the landscape here.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, interview.

- Another said that the focus was not on the university itself but rather the community of which the university is a part.
- Finally, one respondent said that the vision of the church was to reach 18-24 year olds, whether they were connected with the university or not.

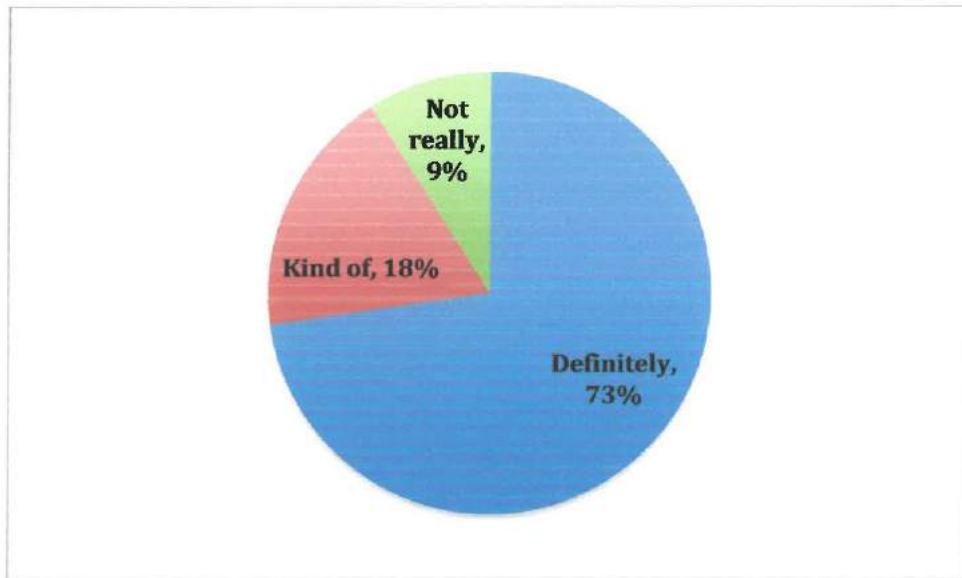
### *Summary*

The respondents all described some way of working out the target population as being a combination of the university population itself and the community around the university. They ranged from two who expressed the idea that the university was not really a distinct part of their target to a few who expressed that the university community was the most dominant part yet not the exclusive focus of their vision.

### *Self-Assessment of University Orientation*

The original question was listed like this: "Self-assessment of university orientation: Would you consider your church a university-oriented church?"

As depicted in Figure 15, eight of the eleven respondents confidently asserted that their churches were university-oriented based upon the definition provided in this study.



**Figure 15: Is your Church a University-Oriented Church?**

Those who said “Definitely” expressed it using words like, “Definitely. It was the reason for the church plant.”<sup>12</sup> “It’s a given based on the city where we live.”<sup>13</sup> “Very much so. It was the reason for the founding of the church.”<sup>14</sup> “So many of the original people came from that community.”<sup>15</sup> “Clearly it is the ‘aspiration’ of the church, and sometimes it does better than others.”<sup>16</sup> “That’s our calling.”<sup>17</sup> “It was the reason for the founding. But definitely not *just* students.”<sup>18</sup> “It’s directly the vision.”<sup>19</sup> “No question.”<sup>20</sup>

As for the respondents who gave a more qualified “kind of,” one said, “I want to say ‘somewhat,’ just in the sense that like ... it’s definitely oriented towards university students but that’s part of a cluster of things.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, interview.



Another respondent in the “kind of” category said that the church was not exclusively for students yet the community in which the church existed was highly influenced by the university. The respondent went on to describe that the church intentionally did not change anything to accommodate students since the vision was to draw all people, students included, into what church should be for everyone.

The church that said it was “not really” university-oriented said that the church’s strategy was to focus on the people who came and others like them. Historically speaking, when there were many college students in the church, it was at that point that the church focused more on college students. When there were not as many students already in the congregation, then the church did not particularly pursue them.

### *Reflection*

For this question as well as several others, specifically categorizing churches according to the options given was not an obvious process. For most of the respondents, there was no question about their university orientation given their definite responses about their calling or their reason for existing. Others, however, qualified their answers as described above, which is why the “kind of” and “not really” categories were created. Note that the three churches categorized here as “kind of” and “not really” university-oriented will be identified as such in other items of this study.

A significant surprise in this item was how many respondents pointed back to the original vision of the church in response to this question, even among the oldest churches. Clearly they saw a close connection between the original vision and where the churches were still aiming today.

## *Church Congregation*

The original question was listed like this:

Describe the church congregation. In particular:

Approximately how many people...

...are there overall? \_\_\_\_\_

...are college or university students? \_\_\_\_\_

...are college or university faculty or staff? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the blend between "town" (non-academic people) and "gown" (academic people)?

Almost all "gown"

Mostly "gown"

Evenly split

Mostly "town"

Almost all "town"

Approximately what fraction of the members and active attendees are ...

55+: \_\_\_\_\_ %

35-54: \_\_\_\_\_ %

18-34: \_\_\_\_\_ %

0-17: \_\_\_\_\_ %

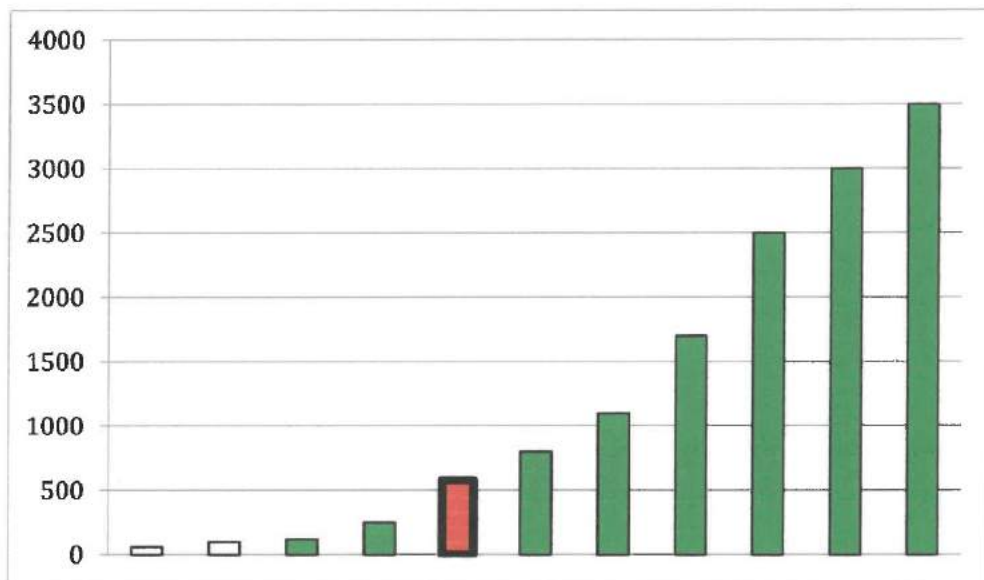
This item will be addressed in each of its sub-parts, including the number of total attenders, the number of students, and the number of faculty and staff.

### Total Attenders

The total number of people in the churches was reported above. It included here again in Figure 16 but with a slight change in counting method. That is, mid-week student worship services are included in the total number, recognizing that this approach might count the same people multiple times (see the note below).

In addition, the shading of the bars represents the answers given by the less clearly university-oriented churches. The green/gray bars are churches who said they were definitely university-oriented above, the two un-shaded bars on the left end are

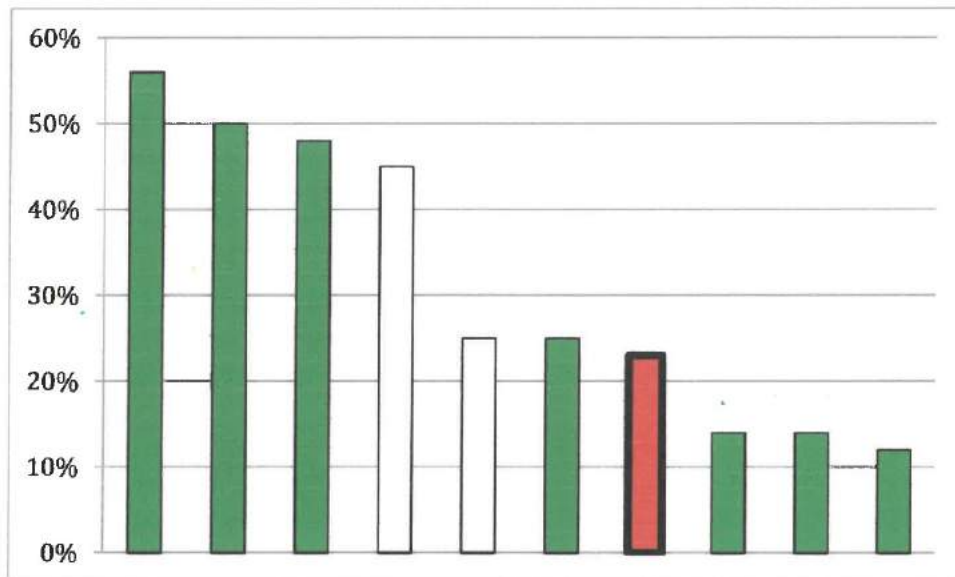
respondents who said, “kind of,” and the red bar with the thicker border is the church that said it was “not really” university-oriented.



**Figure 16: Weekly Attendance (including Mid-Week Worship Services)**

Seeing this chart, one might be tempted to think that small churches are less likely to be university-oriented, but even if the sample size had been larger, these data would not support such a conclusion. Churches were selected for the study because of their reputation as being university-oriented, and it would not be surprising that university-oriented churches that were bigger churches would have a broader reputation for being university-oriented and thus would be more likely to be included in this study. As such, the data points were not randomly chosen and should not be used to generalize. Therefore, these data should not be used to say that smaller churches are less able or less inclined to be university-oriented.

### Percent of Attenders who Are Students



**Figure 17: Percentage of Attenders who are Students**

The coloring of the bars in Figure 17 is the same as in Figure 18 above. That is, the green/gray bars are churches who reported being definitely university-oriented, the un-shaded bars are respondents who said, “kind of,” and the red bar with the bolder border is the church that said it was “not really” university-oriented.

Surprisingly, there is no clear correlation, even in this small sample size, between the percentage of church attenders (or members in one case since those were the statistics available to that respondent) that are students and the churches’ self report about being university-oriented. For example, one of the churches with the higher percentage of students (around 45%) said that it was “kind of” university-oriented. On the other extreme, the church with the lowest percentage of students involved in the church (less than 15%) gave one of the strongest claims to being university-oriented. Accordingly, while the data are not statistically significant, a qualitative description of these churches

suggests that there is not a reliable correlation between the percentage of students in a church and the vision of that church.

On the surface, this lack of correlation is very surprising, yet, upon further reflection, it actually is very reasonable. One of the churches with a high percentage of students was founded as a church of students intended to reach a non-student population. As such, it still had a large student population because of its historical roots even though its vision was not particularly for the university. In addition, the “not really” university-oriented church expressed the idea that the presence of college students in the church was the result of factors other than the vision of the church. Namely, the church was close to a university, so it naturally drew some students, and it was in a point in time when a number of children of families in the church were college age. In a sense, the large percentage of college students was accidental rather than intentional.

The church with the lowest percentage of students described a strong vision for ministry not just among students, and its vision was not to do church ministry specifically for students. So its goal was to attract faculty and staff as well, and once these people (students as well as adults) were attracted, its vision was to include them in the broader life of the church. Its desire was to include a range of people from the community and not just to be a student church, and the adults from the academic community who were included would not be readily distinguishable from other adults in the congregation.

These responses suggest that it is not possible to know whether a church is university-oriented simply by knowing what fraction of those involved in the ministry are students or are otherwise connected with the university.

Another subtlety that these data do not address is how people were counted. In particular, in two of the churches there were hundreds of students who were involved in the ministry of the church (in particular, a mid-week worship service for students) and yet did not attend the worship services for the broader congregation on Sundays. So it was not obvious how these students should be counted. Were they really a part of the church or just a part of a college ministry sponsored by the church? That issue will be addressed further below. For this graph, the estimate was based on treating the mid-week worship service as another worship service of the church (so attendance from the mid-week service is added to the overall attendance of the church) and the numbers of students in each service were added as well since any students who attended both the weekend and mid-week services were adding to the student population as well as to the overall attendance figure.

Percentage Faculty and Staff

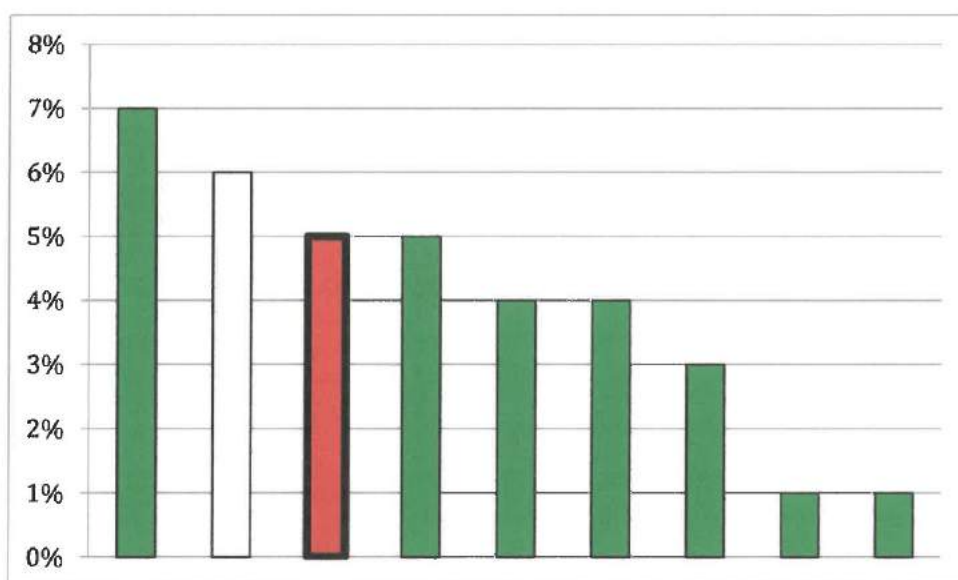


Figure 18: Percentage of Attenders who are Faculty and Staff



Figure 18 represents the percentage of people on any given week in the church who were faculty or staff in the academic setting. Again, the coloring indicates the degree to which the respondent agreed that the church is university-oriented. Note that there is only one un-shaded “kind of” university-oriented bar in the graph because a respondent from the other “kind of” university-oriented churches did not have a good guess as to how many faculty or staff attended.

It should be noted that data on the number of faculty and staff who attended the churches seemed to be less reliable than numbers of students. Respondents expressed that these people blended in more with other adults in the congregation and so were not as easily counted. They also mentioned the complication of how to count a family unit where one spouse was on faculty. That is, it was not obvious to them whether the other adult in the family should be counted as being interested in or a part of the university community.

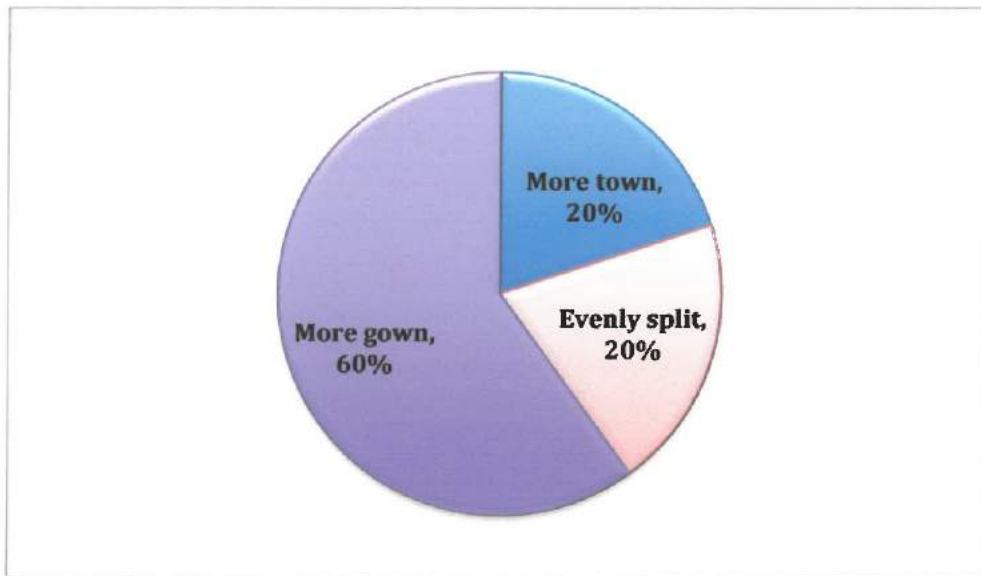
Again, these limited data suggests that a correlation is not likely between the percentage of faculty and staff in the church and the vision of the church. Obviously there are many possible explanations, yet this study offers no particular insight into which explanations may be most accurate.

An issue that was raised repeatedly by respondents was about how staff in medical schools and teaching hospitals relate to “faculty and staff.” Medical schools were reported to be a significant element by three of the respondents. All of these respondents were encouraged to include academic personnel from hospitals associated with the university in their estimates.



### Blend between "Town" and "Gown"

People answered this question with a three-part range as in Figure 19.



**Figure 19: "Town" versus "Gown" Distribution**

Note that one church is not represented here since that respondent did not give a clear answer to the question. As with the earlier charts, there was no clear correlation between being "more gown" and being university-oriented. In particular, the "not really" university-oriented church was in the "more town" category, one of the "kind of" university-oriented churches was in the "evenly split" category and the other was in the "more gown" category.

One church that expressed its makeup as being "more gown" and being university-oriented expressed it this way:

I would say, because the university is such an influential aspect of the life of [our city], that most people are going to be very comfortable talking about the life of the university, even if they themselves are not actively teaching there or working there. So well over half I would say would feel some rather strong tie, if not a direct tie. And again, even the other half, a good half of that would feel, that is not such a distant memory.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, interview.

Another respondent similarly described the breadth of connection with the university community in his church, “[People in the town category have] a strong allegiance to the [university]. Most people have a strong affiliation. A lot of people went to [this school] and stayed here, or moved back here.”<sup>23</sup>

One respondent who answered “more town” similarly wrestled with how to determine which people have a strong connection with the university community:

I’m thinking about anecdotes [of university influence] in [Sunday morning] worship life, but they’re not limited to it. We pay more attention to the “gown” than most churches will but I think that we are appropriate and mindful of “town” in general. If you were to include in that emotional tie you’re talking out, people’s introduction to [this church], happening when they were a student, then yes, I would say most people.<sup>24</sup>

As is clear from these answers, how best to categorize respondents was sometimes not very obvious from their descriptions. In reality, there often were not clear delineations between which categories best described each ministry.

### Age Distribution

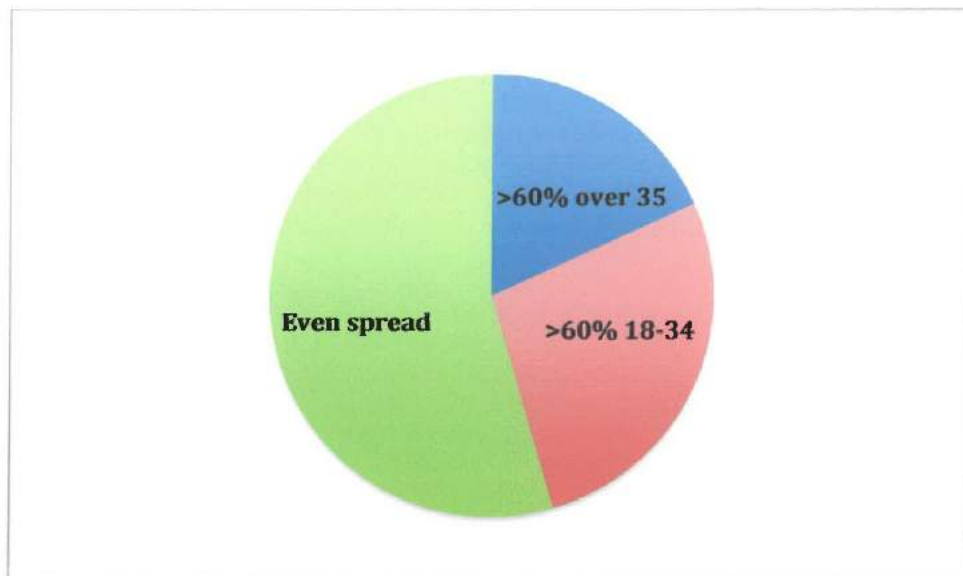
Note that individual churches categorized ages of attenders differently. The categories for this question were basically designed to focus on whether or not a church was primarily a *young adult* (18 to 34 years old) church. As such, the age ranges were chosen to reflect pre-college (0-17), college and young adult (18-34), middle aged (35-54), and older adults (55+). Since not all churches could give specific numbers, the data are reported in Figure 20 by categorizing churches according to the predominant age group, whether the majority was older people (more than 60% of the congregation was

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<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, interview.

over 35), the majority was younger people (more than 60% of the congregation in the range 18 to 34), and mixed congregations.



**Figure 20: Predominant Age Group of the Churches**

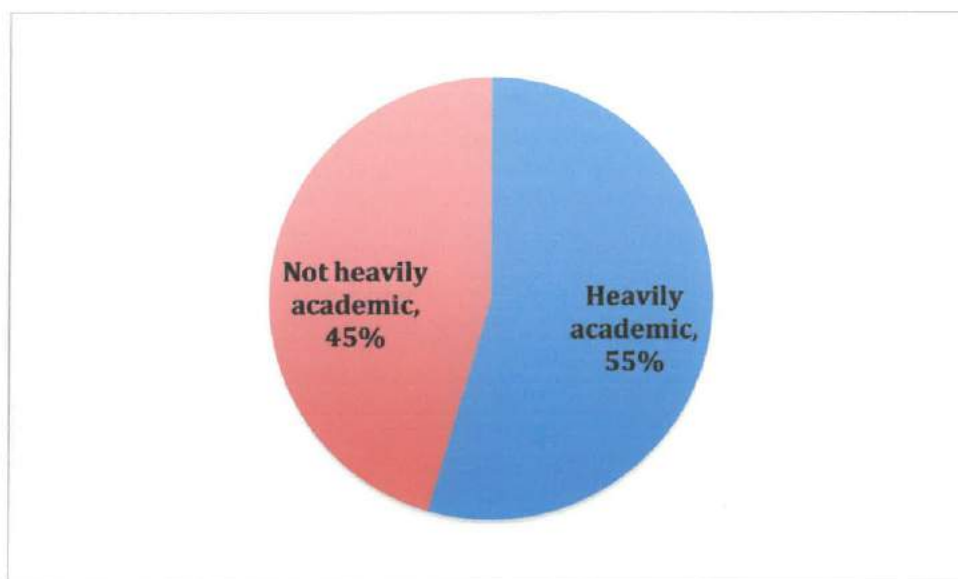
The “not really” university-oriented church was in the evenly spread category. The “kind of” university-oriented churches both had more than 60% of the church in the 18 to 34 year old range. One of these has 90% of its people in the 18-34 range.

As was seen above, demographic metrics which one might assume would indicate the vision of the church were not accurate predictors of the vision given in this limited sample.

### *Culture of the University Community*

The original statement of this question was, “How would you describe the culture of the university community? (e.g., heavily academic, practical/professional, urban, suburban, rural, intercultural, ...)” Perhaps the most significant aspect of this item was how “heavily academic” a university culture was. Just over half of the respondents described their setting as “heavily academic.” Of course what exactly this description

means is not immediately obvious, yet the descriptions had face validity given the schools in their community. That is, respondents who described the communities as being “heavily academic” included Ivy League and Tier 1 Research institutions<sup>25</sup>.



**Figure 21: Academic Intensity of the Local University Community**

The two “kind of” university-oriented churches both described the local university as heavily academic, and the church that was “not really” university-oriented was in the “not heavily academic” group.

Sample responses from the “heavily academic group” describing the university community included

Very close knit in terms of the students, high sense of community, high bubble effect in terms of just like the students tend to stay pretty much on campus for the most part. Very academic. Students tend to be very passionate about what they’re doing, a lot of global concerns, a lot of foreign study programs, and very kind of worldly I guess in that sense, I don’t know. Relatively entrepreneurial, high emphasis on leadership, as far as the student world.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> As described by the U.S. News University Directory, <http://www.usnewsuniversitydirectory.com/undergraduate-colleges/national-universities.aspx?tier=1> (accessed November 21, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, interview.

I would say all of the above [descriptions including intercultural, urban, professional, practical]. Because again we have so many universities. It spans the whole thing. It's not just like, "we're a college town of one school." The culture is that diverse. Across the street from [the church] is primarily a community campus. Down the street there is, like 3 blocks that way, is another campus that has a large component of students living there, but they're very much integrated in the world of the arts. So a lot of times they're integrated not in a traditional university setting. They're right from the get-go interning at [a major broadcasting company] or something like that. And then there's the traditional university like [another school]. So it is impossible to say that [this city] has one kind of university culture. It has everything from the very competitive, research university like [this school] to the very much practical commuter school, evening school dominated. We have a good component of students who come from [this commuter school]. That's way out in the suburbs in a bucolic suburb of [the city]. So it's the whole range.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, a respondent from the "not heavily academic" group said

The people we interact with, they are coming here as a means to end. They want either their undergrad or they're going to medical school or law school, in order to get the heck out of here. That's the goal. Even if they're from [this city], or if they're from outside of [this state], they have absolutely no intention of being here. They just want to get their degree and get out. If they're from [this state] they also don't have any intention of staying here. For the most part they want to get out. So there's this definite, "get something and then go" [mentality].<sup>28</sup>

Others described a split between those who were pursuing their education because of a deep interest and commitment in learning, and those who just wanted a degree in order to get on to their careers.

Another respondent emphasized the large international population, representing close to 5% of the overall population of the school.

Two respondents mentioned how their academic communities were becoming more competitive academically, in part because of increasing enrollments from farther away. As such, the emphasis on academic performance was higher than in the past.

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<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous, interview.



One respondent very articulately described the culture of the local academic community:

In the plural, for starters. It's not "That culture." It's "Those cultures." It's just a sea of variation. I guess that's the first part of the culture. It's not particularly homogeneous, and in any case it is decidedly not homogeneous and therefore whatever we're going to do, we have to be committed to a multilingual cultural engagement that's going to have to have tremendous variation and flexibility and curiosity and creativity I suppose in figuring out how to engage such a diverse community of people. And that's true again within the three pockets of faculty, students, and staff, and within students, undergraduates and graduate students. So it's variation.

I'd say it's an intensely secular set of assumptions, no presuppositions about the commonness or the easiness of talking about faith in that setting. It's loaded. Not neutral. Sometimes educated about religion and issues of faith and theology, but more commonly not, so it's full of lots of presuppositions that may or may not be accurate to the faith.

Its reactionary, I suppose is another word by which I mean that it's a community that's in reaction to many things but certainly reaction to anything that would seem like an intellectual hostage taking aura or an intellectual presumption on the part of the church or any other group.

But it's hungry. It's lonely. It's isolated. It's competitive. It's introverted. It's sometimes depressive. All those things are also true, meaning that there's just lots of basic human need on any given day. There's a lot of basic human need just for love, for compassion, for genuine care, on every level, familially, psychologically, emotionally. I think [this school] is a very lonely, depressive community in many ways. So that's also a big piece of how I would describe it, or therefore also one of the ways that we want to be thinking and praying and engaging.<sup>29</sup>

### *Reflection*

Obviously there was a wide range of academic communities in this study. Some communities were much more focused and homogeneous, and some were very diverse. Some had a significant sense of being heavily academic whereas some had little emphasis on purely intellectual pursuits. As such, there seems not to be a standard "universal culture" for a university-oriented church. Presumably what it means to be a "university-

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<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, interview.

oriented” church must vary with the nature of the particular university community to which a church is oriented.

### *Official Stance toward the University Community*

The original question was stated like this: “Official stance toward the university community: What official church policies or actions demonstrate your church’s orientation toward the university community (or not)? (e.g., mission statement, line items of budget, staff positions)” This question is handled in two parts. The first part addresses the question of whether the university community was mentioned in the mission or vision statements, and the second part focuses on the other ways in which churches officially expressed their commitment to that community.

At the most basic level of a church’s expression of its identity, of the eleven churches in this study, three had “university” in their names. The rest had nothing in their names connecting them with their local academic community in particular or with an academic orientation in general.

In terms of the mission and vision statements, there was no obvious pattern. Of the churches that had obvious and deep commitments to the university community, some did not mention that commitment in the official statements for the church while others did. Overall, just three of the eleven explicitly mentioned the academic community in their mission/vision statements. Just one of these three churches also had “university” in its name. In response to the issue of whether or not the academic community was mentioned in the mission/vision of the church, some respondents of churches that did not have it in their mission statement said



[This church] is kind of messy. It's not one for crisp vision statements. So we actually don't even have one, other than we want to honor God.<sup>30</sup>

Sometimes I almost get the sense with a 100-year-old church, that they don't need written policies, that the policies were sort of early on directed in that way. We had ... this one sweet lady who was about 91 and ... she basically said... "Look! We're a university church. That's what we do. And if you don't like that, you're welcome to go somewhere else!" ... This is our DNA. This is not something we put on a mission statement. It's not something we try to market. It's who we are.<sup>31</sup>

[Our] mission statement could be the mission statement for any evangelical church in the United States. It is not in any way tailored towards our [university focus]... it's theologically great but it's not specific. Now that said, [the "refreshing the vision" effort that the church is doing] I would say would be a policy or action that really demonstrates our commitment to the University.<sup>32</sup>

Among those churches that explicitly mentioned the academic community in the mission or vision statements, respondents said

[The campus community is] represented in our mission statement .... It's represented in how the church started, and where it's been. We have very clear values about how we approach campus ministry. One of our core values is partnership with campus ministries, rather than [this church] forming their own separate college ministry. That's been a value of the church for a long, long time. And so that's something that gets discussed.... Culturally we've built around [the academic community]... we're forced to build around the campus calendar.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that [the university community is] explicitly named [in the mission statement that is printed in the bulletin each week] is a reminder to us that it's central. A deliberate reminder.<sup>34</sup>

[Our] core values are definitely crafted with the fact that we are in an academic community. I mean, not that they say, you know, "academics is great" or something like that, but just that I know we're in a thinking, educated community. By the way, [this city], some statistics, nearly 80% of the adults over 25 have undergrad degrees, that's compared to 20% on the national average. Graduate degrees, Masters level and higher, I think the national average is between 5 and 10%. [For this city] this is census bureau statistics nearly 50% of the people have graduate degrees. That's ridiculous.

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<sup>30</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, interview.

That's crazy. Every other person you run into on the street who is over 25, they have a masters or a doctorate or even beyond. [Interviewer: And you took that seriously in crafting the vision?] Absolutely. We wanted to be intelligent, not in a prideful sort of way. But you've got to understand this is part of our community, and we value it and we value them. And then in [the vision document] ... we specifically say..., "The university" and how we want to be perceived by the university. ... And so our policy has always been one of embrace as opposed to one of antagonism. Of course not embracing sin. We could easily adopt the posture, like, "these are the elites who are ruining our nation" or something like that sort of thing [but we do not take that stance].<sup>35</sup>

In short, some expressed the idea that it was unnecessary for them to have the university community explicitly stated in their mission or vision, and others described how important it was for them to include it there.

In addition to formal mission or vision statements, other ways that churches expressed this commitment included:

- Hiring (multiple) staff and interns focused on college students
- Fostering connections between college students who attend the church and families in the church
- Providing rides to and from campus
- Choosing to locate the church near campus
- Choosing to have meetings on campus when possible
- Providing financial support for campus parachurch ministers
- Coordinating ministries with campus parachurch organizations

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<sup>35</sup> Anonymous, interview.

- Offering classes and seminars on campus (described as being like seminary courses)
- Doing an annual “University Sunday” where all campus ministers are commissioned
- Doing special annual worship services connected with university sports teams

One of the more creative means of expressing an official commitment to the university setting was a church that actually formally collaborated with parachurch ministries:

We have a formal relationship with [two campus ministries]. That’s part of our budget. ... And what we decided is we would have this formal partnership, so with the [parachurch] undergrads ministry, we have one of their local staff seconded to us. And so she gives 10 hours of her week as formal staff [to the church], so she is on our staff. And so, we encourage her to help run our college ministry and then we have the same relationship with [a parachurch] grad fellowship. And so one of their staff is on our staff as well. And he is in charge of that same thing, of helping to run our grad student ministry. And again, this is in part a missional decision, knowing that a lot of times the most effective ministry is happening on their campuses. And we want to be a part of facilitating that. And these two partnerships seem to be a very effective way of us supporting and accelerating their ministry, and also encouraging them to connect their students to a local church.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, some actually described an intentional action to distance themselves from direct campus-specific ministry. One respondent said,

In fact, one of the things we did is we’ve pulled back from doing some sort of big campus ministry model. And the model is we want college students to be committed to the local church. So we’re not interested in creating some sort of campus model that causes them to when they graduate to go to another city and not plug into another church. So [we employ] the same strategy [with the college as with other parts of the community] ... the same vision .... It’s basically weekend services, life groups, and the “go” component. So the idea would be go to a weekend service in a local church, be committed to that. Go

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<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, interview.

to a smaller community and reach out in your area. And so hopefully this will develop people who then stay in local churches. ...what's on campus [from our church] isn't any different. But how they do the "go" component, and how they do "life groups," all of that, is intensely campus focused.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, another respondent said,

Because the college students, we feel like, have plenty of opportunities that are geared to college students on campus through campus ministries [we don't do specific ministries for them]. What we can offer them is the official responsibilities given to the local church, that offers them in an environment that shapes them and helps them interact with people that can mentor them, and others who are younger than them, calls them to a kind of accountability that really student ministries are not set up to offer. So I guess, our official stance toward the university community is that what they need most is not a special ministry but a church, and that's what we're trying to be.<sup>38</sup>

### *Reflection*

There was a lot of variety in how churches formally expressed this commitment to the academic community. No two communities were the same, and no two churches were the same, so how the commitment was expressed would logically vary as well. Issues such as the relationship between the church and campus parachurch ministries, as well as what ministries the church specifically targeted to students, will be addressed further below.

### *Making Connections with the University Community*

The original question was stated like this: "Making the connections with the university community: How does your church make connections with people in the university community? Are there specific actions that you take that relate to the multiple dimensions listed in the attached definition (i.e., physical, social, cultural, spiritual)? If so, what are they?"

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<sup>37</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, interview.

## Rationale

Question 7 (included here) and Question 8 (below) reflect two key parts of the definition of university-oriented churches used in this study. The first is “moving toward” the university community, and the second is “engaging” that community with the Gospel. Moving closer comes first, both logically and in this analysis.

In terms of “moving toward,” the responses included a wide range of specific examples. In this analysis, these strategies are grouped as those that are more **attractional** in which programs that are relatively church-centered are made more accessible to people from the university community, and those that are more **missional** in which the people of the church move out into the university community.

## Attractional

- Providing a “student-friendly” worship service (with such “friendliness” being expressed as meeting at a time other than early Sunday morning and matching musical preferences of students)
- Building a glass-walled sanctuary to reduce the psychological distance between those inside and those outside the church
- Encouraging parachurch ministry staff to attend the church, since they naturally bring students with them
- Providing food and fun events
- Bringing in speakers or hosting seminars that address questions of interest to the university

- Offering Sunday lunch seminars after church that are specifically designed for the questions and needs of students
- Intentionally providing physical spaces and environments for students (such as a study lounge) that are easily accessible from campus
- Hosting Spring Break service trips open to anyone wanting to serve, whether Christian or not
- Hosting service projects, including both Christians and non-Christians who shared common concerns, based on local disasters or needs or social justice for the benefit of the community
- Providing pre-marriage and pre-engagement conferences
- Providing evangelistic courses (like Alpha)
- Initiating “Outside the box” small groups that focus on unusual and interesting topics like humor and God or homosexuality

#### Missional

- Helping students move in to the dorm by dedicating a Sunday to provide free labor as students arrive; offering free parking during move in weekend where the church’s parking meets a significant need; collaborating with the university to provide the manual labor of physically moving student furniture and luggage into the dorms

- Campus ministers building relationships with students in general (not just those in the church)
- Having a college pastor serve as chapter advisor for fraternities
- Partnering with campus parachurch ministries who have a stronger presence among members of the university community
- Hosting collaborative service projects with parachurch ministries (both broad-based undergraduate groups like Cru or InterVarsity and specific groups like the Christian Medical & Dental Associations)
- Hosting collaborative service projects with non-Christian groups in the university community (such as social justice efforts)
- Hosting collaborative lecture series with the university
- Encouraging and supporting people in the church who are already part of the community to live out their faith there
- Handing out “free stuff” on campus to initiate relationships
- Having a table on campus where students can drop by for questions, read the Bible, or pray
- Inviting students to be on a committee within the church to explore ways to reach out to students
- Being active on the Web and social media sites



- Specifically following up with any visitors to the church from the academic community, using them as a means to reach others
- Choosing to locate the church by campus, or opening a second site that is closer to students
- Specifically initiating outreach efforts on campus

One respondent gave a fascinating description of how partnering with the university community on concerns held in common between the university community and the church could build this bridge:

We're asking the question, "How can we engage in something at the intersection of our mission and the academy's mission?" We're more than neighbors. We share some common goals and what is the overlap between what the University wants to do and we feel called to do? Maybe having to do with the stewardship of our neighborhood together. Maybe some other alignments. We've talked about childcare for grad students. ... We've got great children's ministry, there's some synergy to come along and serve them in a way and they can serve with us in that partnership goal.<sup>39</sup>

One aspect that was particularly interesting was to move toward the university community by stepping into its worldview and speaking directly to it. Following are example statements from respondents on this issue. This first respondent described how the Sunday bulletin was used to communicate an engagement with the worldview of the academic community.

[Our goal is] to really try to understand first the culture and first try to understand the university. [In the 'reflection section of the Sunday bulletin] you'll find something here from the NY Times, I don't think this is a Christian philosopher. So here's an atheist philosopher, and here you have Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and this very [strong] example of social activism, [and] Christianity kind of all coming together, and a very fascinating person from the history of Christianity, and then you have the Westminster Confession. ...

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<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, interview.

you wouldn't think would belong together but actually you could talk about how each one of these had very central thing of ... the kind of ideas [this church] is grappling with and how it's presented and so it's just you know it's just neat. As a student you come in and you're going to read it, and you're like, "Huh! This is the kind of person I read." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he was a really important person in Germany and history, and the Westminster Confession, and you start to realize there's really a depth and richness to the thought here.<sup>40</sup>

This second respondent described the challenge of reaching the intellectual community without alienating people who are not a part of it:

I think that the challenge was creating an intellectually compelling [message that reaches everyone in our community]... Like on the one hand you have churches that are trying very hard to be intellectually relevant, whether it's church plants like Redeemer in New York, that whole sort of model that is intently focused on being intellectually relevant to a very educated population. We always have had the balance of trying to do that while at the same time trying to be relevant to a very, very different population in our immediate proximity [that is not connected with the university].<sup>41</sup>

One respondent described an intentional effort to understand the worldview of young people so as to be effective in ministry among them:

I want [our college minister] at the table [with the pastoral staff], because I want to be bringing his perspective of his ministry and the challenges they're facing with students, to the discussion of our whole church. I think it's very important that we understand the cultural realities and challenges. I kind of look at [our college and youth ministers] and our youth staff sort of like Lewis and Clark. They're way down the trail, and I want to know what they know and I want to know what they're learning. And we need to know what they understand about the people they're seeking to reach and how that, not just shapes our college ministry, but it influences how we approach our whole ministry. So I think that it's something that's how the church body as a whole seeks to engage the university community with the Gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Another respondent described aspects of their preaching ministry that was intentionally reaching out to the academic culture of the community in which the church serves:

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<sup>40</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous, interview.

There really is the attempt to preach in such a manner, to teach and create an ethos that really is conducive to the life of the mind. And I'll just give you a recent example. We just had [a prominent national scientist who] came and gave the sermon a couple weeks ago on the cosmos and Christ. But basically it's using her research as a scientist and demonstrating how research in that has affected her faith. This was a lot of PowerPoint slides ... and a lot of graphs. That kind of sermon makes sense at [our church], but I'm not sure how many churches it would make sense at.

Again the fact that it was a sermon and not just a seminar or Christian education class. But the fact that we would think it important enough that it be a sermon, I think says a lot about the kind of culture we want it to create, which in turn I think is very attractive for graduate students.<sup>43</sup>

The following description was from a respondent who spoke of their effort to make the most of the concerns felt by students today as they related to the mission of the church:

The values that these students have held for issues of the world, poverty, and some of those things -- it's been good for us as a church. They've almost been out front a little bit of us, saying, "We care about these things. We think God cares about these things." As a church we've got to think of means to care about that. I think that's been good. Their worldview ... I feel part of the student worldview is this whole idea of the Gospel not just being this kind of transactional, you pray a prayer, you get your ticket to heaven, that type of thing. But the Gospel being this big narrative, the big story that we're invited into. ... I think they have a better handle on that a lot of times than those of us who have been around the evangelical church for decades.<sup>44</sup>

One respondent described the need to shift from the "come and see" approach of attractional ministry to the "go and do and be" approach of missional ministry, entering into the community and serving in that context:

It's all the things related to how [our] college ministry itself has established itself in housing groups of different kinds on campus, in clubs, all sorts of different ways to trying to help students understand and see their life in Christ lived out in the context of the university community itself, or faculty to do that, or staff to do that. You know I think we've done that sometimes in partnership with other organizations, parachurch ministries, sometimes in relationship to events that we ourselves sponsored, sometimes through overt

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<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Anonymous, interview.

Christian programming and other times just a very strong consistent emphasis on the importance of, I suppose you could just call, friendship evangelism.<sup>45</sup>

### *Reflection*

Respondents described a wide range of activities that helped them move closer to the academic community in its various dimensions. The activities varied with the setting and culture of both the church and the community. While it would be surprising for any particular strategy to be effective by simply transferring it to another location, it would also seem likely that variations of these strategies would be effective in a wide variety of situations.

### *Actively Engaging the University Community with the Gospel*

The original question was stated like this: “Actively engaging the university community with the Gospel: How does your church actively engage the university community with the Gospel? In what ways do the people of the church do this? In what ways does the church body as a whole do this?” Respondents described a wide range of strategies for engaging the university community with the Gospel. The range of strategies described by participants is listed below along with the respondents’ descriptions as appropriate. The list is broken into two groups as was done for Question 7: those that put greater emphasis on inviting people from the university community into events that are mostly centered in the church (“attractional”) and those that put greater emphasis on people from the church going out among the people of the university community (“missional”).

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<sup>45</sup> Anonymous, interview.

## Attractional

- Preaching that is Gospel focused while also being inviting to the university community

I do think that everything that we do in worship and preaching assumes that we have a significant population of people who are not Christians who are part of the congregation, so some of it I think is that once you start with that assumption, then everything ends up orienting itself towards that. So our preaching and our worship is very clearly geared towards making sense of the Gospel to a population that has not received it and so I think that a lot of it has to do with in terms of rhetoric. How we talk and how we preach, we assume the presence of unbelievers and I do think that that has trickled through the whole church because it's such a fundamental part of what we do.<sup>46</sup>

Some of this is the ethos of creating a place where you can bring your peers. Having these talks by these scientists are something that definitely [causes] attendance jumps, because we could see that people were inviting their lab-mates and so forth. So having these talks on a regular basis in these different fields enables us to make it a natural for people to invite their colleagues to church.<sup>47</sup>

- Small group ministry that specifically targeted the university community, sometimes specifically located in the university environment, and sometimes specifically designed for those exploring the faith (e.g., Christian Explored and Alpha)
- Classes designed for students specifically to teach truth (like a seminary curriculum)
- Shepherding for those who come to the church (that is, something like the traditional sense of following up with visitors)
- Invitation of university community people into the community of the church

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<sup>46</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, interview.

Philosophically we believe the most important thing we can do to engage the community with the Gospel is to offer a local environment, a local church, within the community. Because we need to show a lifestyle and the kinds of love that believers in covenant bear with each other is the most attractive evangelistic force that the church has. We just want to live as faithful covenanted believers in this part of the town. ... So we aren't necessarily philosophically opposed to [specific actions reaching out to the campus], but we don't feel negligent when we don't offer anything beyond basic local church offerings.<sup>48</sup>

### Missional

- Church attenders who are a part of the university community living out the Gospel in daily life. Example responses included

I don't think an attractional approach [inviting non-Christians from the academic community to come to church] is unhelpful, I think it can be an important component to it. But [we want to do more,] really helping people think, "How is Christ at work in the community and how have we been called missionally to live out our Christian discipleship in all the places that God sends us."<sup>49</sup>

[The pastor] very regularly emphasizes this, but it's just, always was helpful, thinking about the doctrine, doxology, duty thing. That really comes out. The head, heart, hands, a whole bunch of alliterative phrases you can use. And I think that comes out in a lot of the sermons. And it's like teaching, but it's heart instruction. It really is a false thing to say that it's just a head engagement. And so ... I think every time you walk away from the sermon, ideally if the Gospel is really being preached then you are walking away thinking about ideas and then those are translated into worship, and how those are lived out in love.<sup>50</sup>

I think some of it's a fundamental outflow of what we understand Christian discipleship is all about, what worship actually looks like. And [our previous pastor] was tremendously helpful in turning our church's attention towards understanding that worship is not just something we do together on Sunday in the sanctuary, but it's something we do with our lives all the time. And to seek justice as an expression of our love for God so I think that this general equipping of people for Christian discipleship is the foundational thing we do. To then have in our ministry to university students to call specific people into sharing in the actual practical living out of that vision with the university

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<sup>48</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, interview.



population or the city. Or our mission outreach department does that with our “Do Justice” efforts, or the other things I was just outlining.<sup>51</sup>

[The task is] trying to help students understand and see their life in Christ lived out in the context of the university community itself, or faculty to do that, or staff to do that.<sup>52</sup>

As well as personal discipleship, we try to think of ways of encouraging them to reach out to their peers on campus and elsewhere. I would say we’re very good at creating culture that once someone comes in they will say, “Gosh, so this is Christianity? I’m very interested in this.”<sup>53</sup>

I think that we emphasize the “go” piece so much that we almost overemphasize the “go” piece, so that the volunteer [within the church] piece actually became a struggle. ... We talk about facing outward as a church, intentionally facing outward. We’re not going to face in. We’re not doing this for us. We talk a lot about the fact that the Gospel is not primarily for you although it is. When you’re a Christ follower, it’s intentionally about others and about his glory. So when you’re facing outward in that sense, also we talk about going.<sup>54</sup>

Our philosophy assumes that individuals as a way of life are engaging where they work and live with folks who aren’t part of our church. And it’s through that engagement the folks who aren’t part of our church get a window into what Gospel centered living looks like.<sup>55</sup>

- Task forces in which members of the church who were interested in an issue that the community also cared about gathered around that issue, such as the environment or international students. These groups then interacted with people in the community on the issue and sought to bring the Gospel into the picture. For example,

It has been to invite people into seeing what is God doing in the world and what is God’s purpose for this world, and seeing that not as the entire Gospel, so the issues of justice and reconciliation are not “the Gospel” but they are a part of the Gospel. And those have become entry points for people I think who are not Christian and [we see it] in terms of resonating with the broader values

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<sup>51</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, interview.



and in saying, “Oh, this is something that the church and that God is involved with in the world.” And so that’s been an initial connection point.<sup>56</sup>

Several respondents expressed that their churches needed to grow in this area of engaging the university community with the Gospel. That is, their churches made connections with the academic community, yet they were not engaging that community with the Gospel as they would have liked.

In addition, one respondent distanced their church from traditional “witnessing”:

We do not engage in, say for example a “witnessing campaign” where we would just go out and take tracks and you have to kind of be careful how you say this, it’s not that that’s not important, but we would rather be known as a congregation that serves and meets the needs of people and that it’s the service that gives us the opportunity or the platform upon which we then get to tell why we do what we do.... we don’t necessarily engage in what a lot of people would call conservative witnessing tactics, for example, in terms of the Gospel, but more we’re here to serve you and your families, and the reason we do that is because Christ says that he came to serve and was willing to give his life as a ransom for others and so let us show you who we are by how we live our lives. ... I think that the academic community makes this possible. I think just the desire for truth and truth itself being a part of an academic community makes presenting the Gospel in ways that make people say, “Tell me more about that.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Actively Engaging: Equipping the People of the Church*

The original question was stated like this: “Actively engaging the university community with the Gospel: In what ways do you equip the people of your church to do this?” Again, this is an area that several respondents described as a relative weakness in their churches. Strategies that they described in this area included:

- Preaching: The goal was to motivate people to engage other people in their lives with the Gospel, and to equip them with the understanding needed to do so.

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, interview.

- Testimonies that people share when being baptized: These testimonies served to illustrate and to motivate this approach to living and interacting with others.
- Highlighting ministry that was taking place (e.g., reporting back from service and missions trips): Again, these ministry highlights were intended to illustrate what ministry is like, and to motivate people to become more actively involved.
- Discipleship classes of various kinds, including those for members as well as those for new attenders: These classes addressed the knowledge needed to engage people with the Gospel as well as the growth needed to be active in doing so.
- Mentoring, specifically starting with core church and college-ministry leaders.

One respondent described how the high degree of integration of the church community with the academic community naturally made all equipping efforts in the church to be effective in equipping for ministry in the academic community:

Because there's such a huge population of university [people], there's nothing that we need to do by way of [specific application to the academic environment]. If I teach a class on evangelism, I just need to teach a class on evangelism. 50% of the people, their target audience is the university. So I don't need to make a big deal of reaching the university. Because half the class, their application points to all the exercises on evangelism are reaching their university related people. So I don't think the church needs to do anything like, "Alright, let's take this family that lives out in the suburb, and let's motivate them to go to the university with this university outreach," because we have tons of university related people who should be doing that just as the natural course of their life. ... I think the things that we're doing are very specific by virtue of these relationships. ... Even the general sermons on being a faithful witness at the workplace, for 50% of the people it's going to be something related to a university. And so in that respect I would say most of everything that we do in some way will be an encouragement toward

university ministry because that will be application for most people. For half the people at least.<sup>58</sup>

The newest church expressed that it planned to get engaged in such equipping, but the tasks of starting up the church had overwhelmed the available personnel, so this task has had to wait.

In contrast, one church actually said that they intentionally do not do specific coaching or equipping for this kind of outreach ministry:

We had to go to a point where we said we don't have the infrastructure to do that. And we're trusting that in people's lives, the Holy Spirit in people's lives, we got to a point where we said we provide coaching and financial support for our core ministries which is only a handful. And everything else, we moved into an 'indie' category [like the independent music industry]. On a record label you have the artist that you promote to get on Rolling Stone, that you do all of your major efforts with. Then you have an "indie" label where it's easy to sign up, it's easy to get on that label, and it doesn't have as much exposure. Our Indie stuff, we basically tell people if you want to start a new ministry just start one. And people get confused by that because it's way too simple. In fact I posted a video online about the three steps to start a new ministry, and it's just, "Start one. Start one. Start one." Just do it. And they say, "Don't I need..." and no, you don't need coaching. You don't need finances. If you're a follower of Christ, do it. And so finally I think people are getting that but they still say, "Can I get some coaching?" No, you can figure it out. So we're kind of the opposite. We brazenly provide no coaching.<sup>59</sup>

### *Reflection*

As is clear, not everyone responded to the idea of equipping people for Gospel engagement with the university environment the same way. Most of what was described seems very similar to the general strategies one might expect in any church for equipping people for ministry, whether or not the church had a university-oriented vision.

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<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Anonymous, interview.

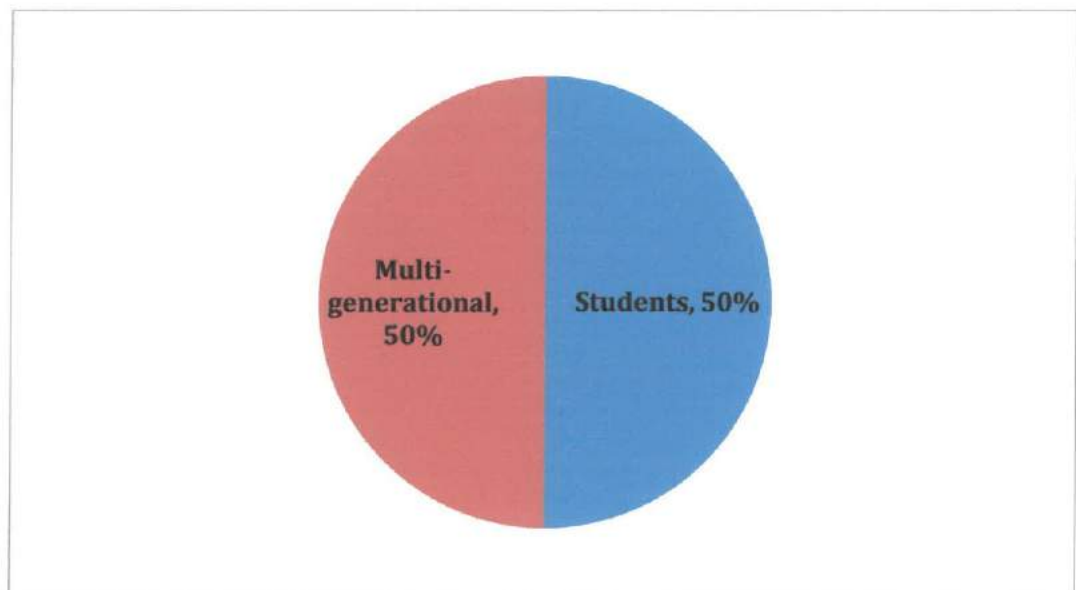
### *Turning Points*

The original question was stated like this: “Turning points of the university-orientation of this church: When the church was initially formed, what was target age group?” This broad question of the history of the university-oriented vision of the church is central to this study, and as such, it has multiple parts. The question will thus be addressed based on these sub-questions:

- The original target group of the church when it was started
- The original stance toward the university community
- Today’s stance toward the university community
- Historic variation of this stance
- The source of the university-oriented vision
- The church being “of” the university or “to” the university
- Major decisions of the church that have affected this vision
- Major events that have affected this vision

As seen in Figure 22, in terms of the original target population of these churches when they were first started, respondents were evenly split between those specifically aiming to reach students and those whose original vision was multi-generational. Note that one of the respondents was uncertain of the original target audience which explains the even number of churches represented in the figure. Also note that of the three

churches that were “kind of” and “not really” university-oriented, one was originally student focused and two were originally multi-generational.



**Figure 22: Original Target Population of the Church**

As explanations of these choices, here are some comments from the respondents who said “multi-generational”:

We wanted to be a community church that was accessible to students. We didn’t want to have a student church. We don’t want a student church. We don’t want a campus church. We don’t want a college church. We want a community church that’s accessible to students that is viable.<sup>60</sup>

I think [the original] was a multi-generational community from [the planting church] that had very specifically an eye for students.<sup>61</sup>

Other respondents described how their churches had started specifically for students. They also described how the vision of their churches broadened as the students aged. Three of the churches formed specifically as a group of students growing out of campus parachurch ministries while another was planted specifically for students but not from within a student ministry. One had the vision of students serving the urban

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, interview.

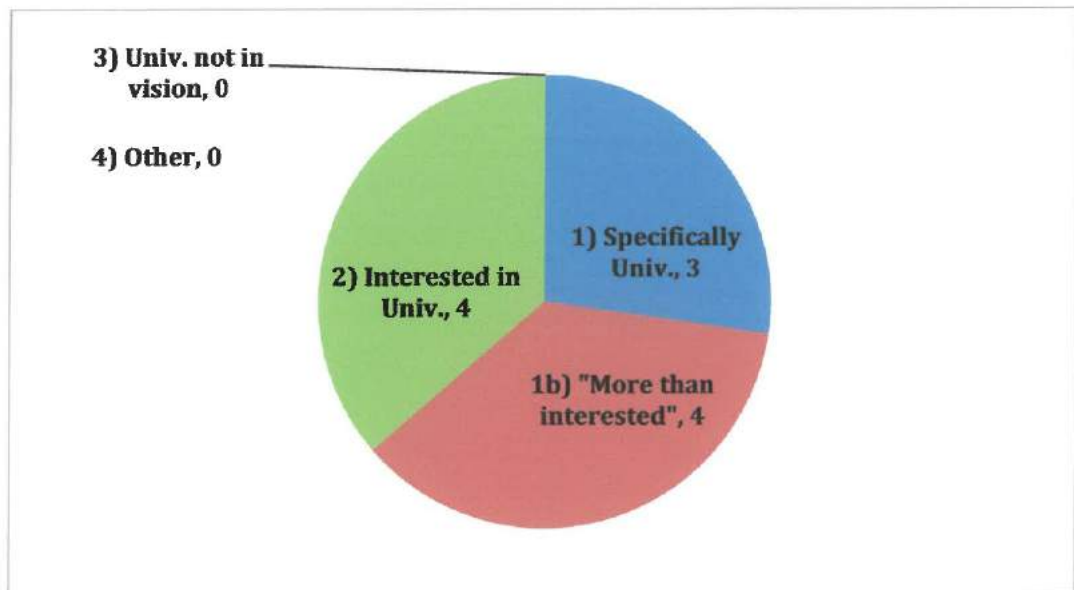
community around them, so it was students seeking to reach a population largely disconnected from the academic community. That population was primarily made up of “at-risk” individuals who were from a different ethnic background than the students.

The rest of the churches were formed by groups outside of the university community. Four churches were planted by other churches that wanted to start a church specifically to impact the university community. Another three were planted largely by denominations, again with the specific intention of having an impact on the university community. Two others were formed by groups of families that shared this vision.

### *Initial Vision*

The original question was stated like this: “When the church was initially formed, what was its stance toward the university community?” The options for this question were, “Its specific vision was for the university community,” “It was interested in reaching the university community,” “The university community was not a part of its vision,” and “Other.” In response to this question, four respondents created a category in between “1) Specific vision” and “2) It was interested” while none of the respondents chose options 3) or 4). As such, Figure 23 shows the data with the revised categories.





**Figure 23: Original Stance toward the University Community**

Note that the respondent who expressed that his church was “not really” university-oriented today answered “specifically university” in answer to the original vision of the church. The other two “kind of” university-oriented churches both chose “Interested in the university community” as the original stance of their churches.

One respondent whose answer fit into the “more than interested” category described the initial vision of the church as follows:

[This church] was put in its current location because it wanted to be at the heart of commerce so smack dab in the middle of [the city] at that time next to what was the major market area.... Again at that time its steeple was the highest [structure in the city]. The steeple was intentionally, though there were only 26 people building it, it was intentionally built to be the most imposing structure to demonstrate to [the city] the thought that the Gospel really is the center of all life, whether it's commerce or politics. And on the other side was a major burial ground [of the city]. So the thought was that we situated the sanctuary between commerce and man's eternal destiny. And that's why it was put in that location, to represent that whatever happens here affects both one's eternal destiny and one's work in the world. ... And again, it was less about the university because there just weren't the number of universities [at that time]. But at very significant junctures throughout, as university life became more and more apparent. ... the tying thing behind all of those things was a very strong emphasis on, “we have to recapture the mind,” that there needs to be this neo-evangelicalism that really embraces the life of the mind



and that rejects the anti-intellectualism that seemed to be growing in American Christianity. ... Again it's very natural with the commitment to be a kind of place, whether overtly reaching the university or not, to be a kind of place where university has a natural affiliation. And the type of faith that's being proclaimed and advocated is the kind of faith that naturally engages the university.<sup>62</sup>

### *Reflection*

A pattern seen in these churches is that none moved significantly into the vision of reaching the university after its start. They all began with a deep commitment to reach this community. (One respondent of a 100+ year old church said that while the details of the very first days of the church are a little unclear, almost immediately after the people started to meet in the proximity of the university, they clearly caught the vision for the university and it has been core to the church ever since.)

### *Current Vision*

The question was stated like this: "Today, what is the church's stance toward the university community?" The original options for this question were, "Its specific vision is for the university community," "It is interested in reaching the university community as one part of its vision," "The university community is not a part of its vision," "The church is trying to decide what place the university community has in its vision," and "Other." As seen in Figure 24, the clearest way to represent these responses is to use the same categories as above regarding the original vision of the church.

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<sup>62</sup> Anonymous, interview.

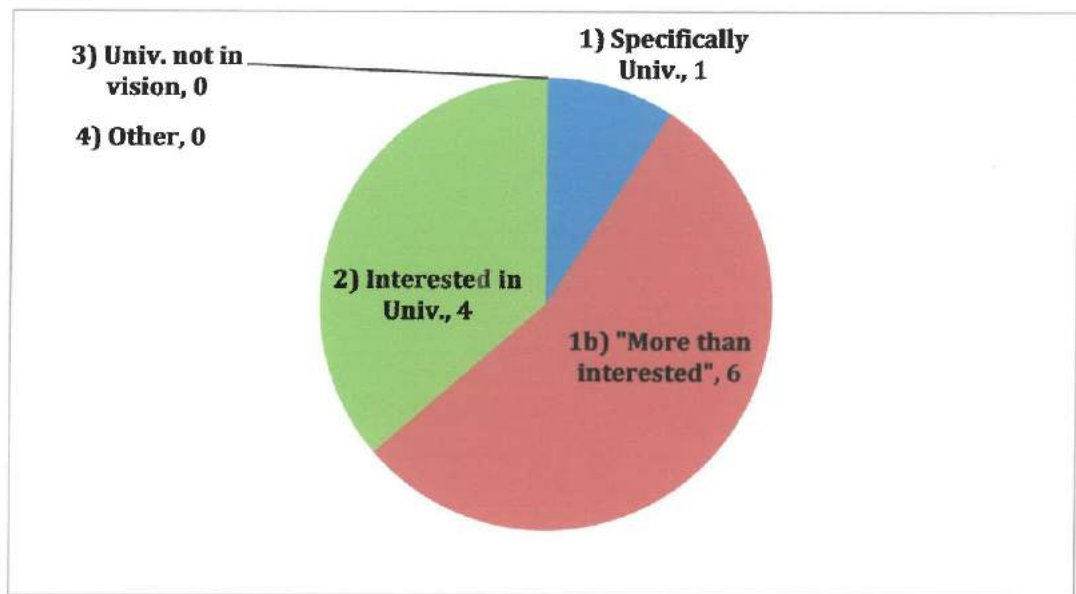


Figure 24: Today's Stance toward the University Community

Only one respondent described the church as having a vision specifically for the university community. The remaining respondents were split between those who were “more than interested” and those who were “interested” in reaching that community.

Respondents from the four churches in the lowest category described the university as an important part of their vision yet not central to it. For example,

[Our church is] designed to reach this community of which the university is a vital part. It's one of the major reasons that we felt that this community was strategic. But it was never exclusively for the university. ... It's not part of our vision for how we do church, but it was part of the reason we chose this location. The university doesn't shape our understanding of the church and its function and purpose. But it is our desire to have a healthy local church in this environment.<sup>63</sup>

I think that [the vision] has changed over time. It was really founded as a mission church to the university. [Over time the actual vision] sort of depends on the demographics of the congregation as to how closely we identify with these descriptions. [The respondent described that when the congregation naturally had many college students, it was more oriented toward the university next door. When it did not, its interest was focused more on the then current demographics of the congregation.]<sup>64</sup>

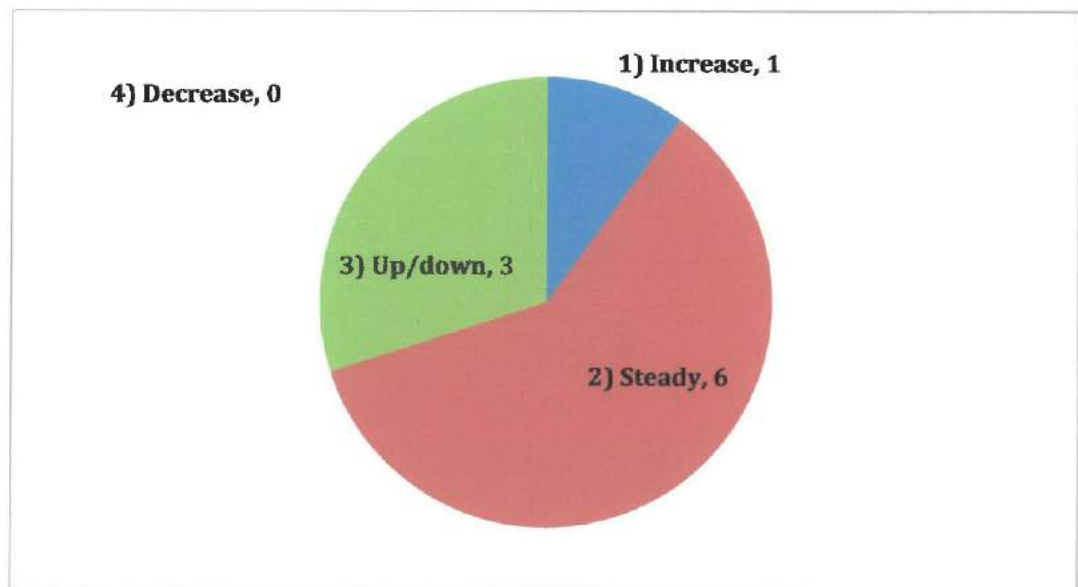
<sup>63</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, interview.

The respondents from the “more than interested” category described the existing vision in terms of a more *mature* vision than its original vision. This matured vision, they explained, appropriately reflected a rich interaction between the university community and the people around that community. Several people spoke of this vision as being in the “DNA” of the church, a vision that is “woven into the values” of the congregation, and part of the core “ethos” of the church.

#### *Change in Vision Over Time*

The question was stated like this: “Over the history of the church, has the church’s stance toward the university community remained the same, increased, decreased, gone up and down, or other?” As seen in Figure 25, these responses are graphed a little differently from the ordering of the question to more naturally reflect the continuum. That is, they are categorized as: 1) increase, 2) steady, 3) up and down, and 4) decrease. None of the respondents answered “4) decreased.” The respondent from the church that was less than a year old declined to answer, saying it was too early to say.



**Figure 25: Historical Progression of the University-Oriented Vision**

The respondent who described the vision toward the university as increasing said enthusiastically

Increased. No question about it. From day one. From day one it has increased. ... We've just hired a guy to write our history, but so far as we can determine, the partnership with, the interest in and partnership with the university has increased for 100 years. There really has never been a time that we can see on our records where the church felt any differently about the university and its place here.<sup>65</sup>

For the eight churches that still identify themselves as "Definitely" university-oriented, the predominant theme was that the commitment to university-oriented ministry never truly wavered, even though their effectiveness in pursuing that vision had up and down periods.

From all categories, respondents described the challenges that their churches encountered through the years of ministry. One who described the vision as being "up and down" related a time when the church almost closed its doors because of the challenges it encountered. Yet through unexpected support from the secular community, it chose to continue and has returned to the broadly effective ministry it had earlier experienced.

#### *Source of Vision*

The question was stated like this: "What was (were) the source (sources) of the university-oriented vision for this church?" The answers to this question were particularly challenging to categorize. The best description of the various pieces came from this respondent:

Well, it came from, really, in the best sense, maybe two sources. One was really good originating DNA which has always been very, very positive to point back to about why the church was founded, and its commitment to the

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<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, interview.

university and the vision that is behind that. But I do think it's also been over the years it has been a function of choosing senior pastors that would want to engage in that process. It's definitely been the constant influx, of course, and the presence of people who are university people who in that setting then means that they see and are regularly rejuvenated by the challenge of what's so physically present and evidenced everywhere that you look as you drive around [this city] or park in [this city] or are a student at [this school] or whatever. So it constantly begs the question, "And what are we doing about this?" So I think in that sense it's a kind of in-your-face reality which I think some churches just disengage from or take as kind of window dressing or something, whereas, what I think has remained central is that generation by generation this church has thought that the Gospel itself is for this world and engages this world, so it's certainly not the case that we can push it off or look away even.<sup>66</sup>

Combining this respondent's comments with those of others, these churches pointed to:

- "Originating DNA," whether from the planting families, the original pastor, or the church or denomination planting the church
- Leadership, especially the senior pastor, with some respondents able to point to particular pastors who reinvigorated that vision for the church
- People in the congregation who are a part of the university community
- The influx of people who are attracted to this vision and thus reinforce it
- The church being located physically within the university community, so attending church necessarily confronts the people of the church with the issues of this community
- The self-reinforcing consequences of being effective in ministry in the university environment which strengthens the church's resolve to stay engaged in it

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<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, interview.

Many respondents described various pressures that made staying engaged in the university community challenging. These pressures included:

- The challenges of being in that physical environment, including limited space and parking, and greater expenses
- The “financial drain” that student ministry inherently is for a church. That is, ministry focused on college students is expensive, and college students have little money to give back to the church. Furthermore, their greater income and thus giving potential generally increases at the very time when they graduate and often move away from the church.
- The pull of the need for family ministry, both as students age and start families, and as friends of families join the church
- The distractions of life and other ministries

One might have expected to hear people speak of opposition from the university, of skepticism and criticism, and perhaps even persecution. Not one person in this study mentioned these issues as concerns. The only mention of these issues was from respondents who said that a critical criterion for a senior pastor in their church was that he not be intimidated by issues like these in the academic setting. Rather, he should actually be excited about engaging the university community around these issues. One described the atmosphere and the corresponding qualities of a senior pastor who would fit the church like this:

[The campus is] just the most amazing collection of philosophies and worldviews that you can imagine. You ought to have someone [as pastor] who is not intimidated but sort of excited about engaging that ... someone who can



join that conversation with a thoughtful presentation of the Gospel. And I think that's something that is what is core in a lot of ways to what attracts us and other people to [this] church because of that approach to engagement.<sup>67</sup>

*Being a Church "Of" or "To" the University Community*

The original question was stated like this: "To what degree is the church a church 'of' the university community in addition to being a church 'to' the university community?" The original question offered this clarification: "In other words, to what degree (and in what ways) do people from that community actively contribute to the overall life of the church in addition to being served by the church?" All of the respondents recognized this tension, and they described their churches as being across the spectrum. Two of the churches have student-focused worship services that happen in the church but not on Sundays. These services are attended almost entirely by students and many of these students do not attend any other worship services in the church. As such, some of these students are primarily recipients of ministry of the church (that is, the church is a church "to" these students). Yet both of these churches also actively engage students in service (that is, the church is also a church "of" these students), one through a heavy emphasis on spring break and summer mission trips, and the other through a strong emphasis on local service projects throughout the year.

One of the fascinating issues that several respondents mentioned was the question of to what degree ministry activities ought to be, or ought not to be, specifically designed for students. As mentioned above, two of the churches have worship services specifically for students, and several have significant small group ministries specifically for students. On the other end of the spectrum, some churches have intentionally chosen not to do anything specifically for students. One respondent said that his church intends never to

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<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, interview.



offer any activities specifically for students, such as a Sunday school class or small groups. The point of that church, he argued, is not to do what is being done by parachurch ministries on campus but rather to provide what parachurch ministries cannot, and that is the intergenerational life of the church.

Another respondent expressed a similar vision, yet he emphasized his concern about having students only come to church for a worship service. The rest of their Christian lives, including discipleship and evangelism, were almost entirely lived out only in the context of other students, and this pattern was, in his view, far from ideal:

That's something we have to continue to work at. So probably one of the challenging sides of our core value of partnering with the campus ministries rather than providing our own college ministry is that there can get to be a tendency of students showing up on Sunday morning to the worship service and then they're gone, and that's it.<sup>68</sup>

One of the key responses to that tension in that church was to call students to serve in the church, and many students (sometimes 50 or more) do serve in the children's ministry of the church. Some respondents pointed out that this problem of attending without serving was not unique to college students, and in fact one argued that there was a greater percentage of college students serving in the church than among other adults. The specific strategies for addressing this problem were setting a high expectation for participation, and planning for ministry that encouraged student interaction with the greater congregation rather than for ministry that reinforced the tendency for isolation.

### *Significant Decisions or Actions*

The original question was stated like this: "What are the major decisions or actions in the history of the church that have made it either more or less effective in

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<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, interview.

reaching the university community?” In addition, this clarification was offered: “For example, when the church selected a location, hired pastoral staff, established its vision, etc., how did an orientation toward the university-community fit into that decision? What impact did those decisions or actions have on the church’s effectiveness in reaching out to the university community?” One of the most prominent issues in terms of decisions for these churches was geographic location. Eight of the churches said that the choice to stay physically close to the student community was among their most important decisions in keeping the university-oriented vision. They chose to plant the church where they did so that they could build the connections with the university community, and in spite of increased costs, inconvenience, and limited space, several mentioned repeated decisions to stay. (See “Choosing to stay in a challenging community” below which describes one church’s extended story about choosing to stay in challenging times.) At the time of the interview, one church continued to meet in a high school, and expected to continue to meeting in that school for the foreseeable future instead of building its own building because there were no options for their own property close enough to campus.

In contrast, one church that is more focused on young people than on the university per se described an influx of students specifically happening when it moved into its own facility farther away from campus. Several factors were involved in this occurrence, yet it suggests that in at least some instances, geographic proximity is not that critical. Another church in the study was actually going through this decision making process at the time of the study, trying to determine what impact it would have on its effectiveness in reaching out to students were it to move. (See the notes below for more about this issue.)

Decisions about pastoral staff were mentioned by several respondents as being very significant. For some, it related to the selection of the senior pastor. One aspect of the importance of the senior pastor is the ability to carry and lead this vision for the church. For those in “highly academic” settings, an additional aspect of the senior pastor role was clearly very important given how much they talked about it. These respondents described the importance of the senior pastor being able to speak articulately and non-defensively regarding the Gospel in the university environment. Responses about this issue included this description of criteria that a church ought to consider for selecting a senior pastor:

[In addition to core theological convictions, you must consider] their gifts that they might bring. I think [you need to consider] the fluency with how you would take orthodoxy and seek to communicate it to the [university community]. So it would need to be somebody who has the fluency in being able to do that to some degree and to do it pretty readily, flexibly, I suppose creatively.<sup>69</sup>

As a negative example to highlight his point, he went on to describe a pastor at a university-oriented church where it was not a good fit:

The main reason I would say [it was not a great fit] was that he was sort of by nature a polarizing personality and a dichotomous thinker. So the moment you would hear him speak, it's always “them/us,” “we/they.” The good guys and the bad guys, let's say. That would never work on a sustained basis at a place like [this church]... because it feels arrogant, and it seems presumptuous. It's reductionist. It's prejudiced, right? So I think for all those reasons it would be an example of saying well, a person might be very orthodox, but if they really have that sort of approach that would never work at [this church]. And it wouldn't work because it feels like it is counter to the best of a university tradition, and it would be counter to the spirit of what we think the Gospel that we're proclaiming seeks to be and to express.<sup>70</sup>

Another respondent described the ability of the senior pastor to engage with the challenges in the academic setting (note that part of this quote was included earlier):

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<sup>69</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, interview.

[We would] really want a pastor that wants to go on [the college organization day when] every organization is lined on [a public area on campus]. It's just the most amazing collection of philosophies and worldviews that you can imagine. You ought to have someone who is not intimidated but sort of excited about engaging that. I think that's something that [we would be] looking for. Someone who can join that conversation with a thoughtful presentation of the Gospel. And I think that's something that is what is core in a lot of ways to what attracts us and other people to the church because of that approach to engagement.<sup>71</sup>

He also said that the senior pastor needs to be someone who was not "cocky" in his differences of opinion:

We want someone with this sort of intellectual horsepower to be able to engage the university. Somebody who had a heart for the university as well.... I think it's because people [in this church], even if they're not connected with the university, they want a thoughtful faith and because they have hired pastors in the senior position who are able to articulate a thoughtful, compelling Christian worldview.<sup>72</sup>

Another respondent described it this way:

Having someone that is an excellent teacher, not just a speaker, but an excellent biblical expositor is extremely high priority. Someone who was able to carry his or her weight in the university setting is either a spoken or an unspoken assumption which will in turn mean a certain pedigree educationally. Frankly I would find it very difficult to imagine [this church] ever hiring someone without a Ph.D. as the senior pastor. In fact, most of our staff, a lot of them, are pursuing or have Ph.D.s themselves. It's that kind of place. It's very encouraged and sought out.<sup>73</sup>

Another respondent described the implications for staff other than the senior pastor (this comment again coming from a highly academic setting):

I suppose in a way it is implicit to the call of the other staff because for example, I can certainly think of many instances when we would be debating whether this or the other person was the right one to hire as a pastor or the director-level person. And depending upon how much congregational level exposure the person and their job was going to have, the higher the expectations for, for example, their ability to speak to a broad audience of people and successfully. And the issue there, I think implicitly and sometimes explicitly, was related to their ability to communicate with the range in the

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<sup>71</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>72</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous, interview.

university community. So if it works out that the person wouldn't be able to be received by that community then they may be skilled in something but not appropriate for our setting. So I'm just saying that that is another example of the way that the presence and importance of engagement of the university would keep coming up.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to selecting people for particular staff positions, respondents also spoke of the decision to dedicate significant resources to ministry related to the university community. One of the big parts of the financial commitment was the hiring of people specifically for college student ministries. And a unique challenge of committing resources to this setting, especially for ministry among students, was that the "payback" to the church is often relatively small. That is, students tend to give less financially back to the church, and after their years on campus, they often move on so that the benefits of investing in them personally also are not felt by the church. About this commitment, one said

Sometimes I think of university ministry as a mission field, and I think missionary work is taking a strategic loss. You throw money away from the church and you don't expect any economic return on that investment. You're doing it because of its strategic value and so you just have to stay after that intention, or other economic factors have a kind of gravitational pull.<sup>75</sup>

Another respondent described a healthy attitude in his church regarding the transitory nature of the academic community by saying, "My sense of [this church] is that they really embrace the university rather than fighting it. So they embrace things like the highly transitional nature of the community. ... I just sense that we're fine being kind of a channel. We talk about being a river rather than a reservoir."<sup>76</sup>

In terms of other decisions that have been significant for effectiveness in university-oriented ministry, other respondents spoke of the significance of decisions

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<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>75</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, interview.

about how ministry is done. Two respondents specifically mentioned the need to avoid being political, yet not avoiding the challenges of society today. The goal, one said, was to address these issues through the Gospel rather than by siding with particular political positions or political parties.

In terms of styles, the respondent from the church that focuses on young people rather than the university community spoke of the significance of the pastor wearing blue jeans rather than khakis as one expression of trying to enter into the culture of the target population. Similarly, several churches mentioned the challenge of identifying musical styles, with one going so far as expressing the belief that students and faculty are unlikely to worship side-by-side. In the respondent's words, "You're talking about two different churches here, a church for faculty and a church for students.... I think faculty will gravitate toward a church that has students and has a focus on students, but I'm not sure students will gravitate toward a church that has a lot of faculty in it."<sup>77</sup>

Key decisions also related to how to take into account the need for non-student oriented ministry. Respondents spoke of creating worship services that were more family friendly, as well as hiring staff to support children's ministry. Assuming that there is a commitment to reach more than just students, they said, there has to be a commitment to dedicate resources accordingly. The tension of limited resources, it seems, is inevitable.

### *Significant Events.*

The original question was stated like this: "Were there events that had a significant impact on the church's vision for the university community? If so, what were they and what impact did they have?" The older churches spoke of significant changes in

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<sup>77</sup> Anonymous, interview.



their cities over time, both with growth and with changes in the population due to immigration and societal changes. One church almost closed its doors because of population changes in the immediate area of the church. Another church was in a city of significant turbulence including riots (as described under “Choosing to stay in a challenging community” at the end of this chapter).

A major challenge encountered by one church was the rise of *niche-based ministries*. That is, several churches had opened in the immediate vicinity of the same university campus that had found great success (at least in the sense of many people attending the church) through a focused approach to church that sought to engage people based on a narrow demographic category. In these cases, the focus was on young people. As such, multi-generational churches, like the one represented by the respondent, had seen their young people go where their specific interests, needs, and preferences were catered to rather than attending a church where people in all age categories were accommodated. This consumer orientation was forcing one church to wrestle through its commitment to intergenerational ministry and how they could live out that commitment while still retaining students who had multiple options for more finely tuned ministry.

Two churches mentioned tragic circumstances as being significant in the history of their ministry. One mentioned the Sunday after 9/11 as being instrumental in the growth of the ministry. Another respondent told the story of a fire in a church building that surprisingly led to a dramatic growth in attendance in its student ministry. Another respondent described how the church’s response of service following a local natural disaster in the community had a significant beneficial impact on ministry.



### *Advice for Others*

The original question was stated like this: “What advice would you give to an existing church that wanted to become more university-oriented? For church plants?” The advice for existing churches and the advice for church plants obviously had a high degree of overlap. As such, the responses will be listed in three parts:

- advice for all churches
- advice more specifically for existing churches that want to become more university-oriented
- advice more specifically for university-oriented church plants

#### Advice for All Churches

The advice for churches was wide ranging. Following are the responses of participants grouped into themes.

- Choose between **having** a university ministry, and **being** a university-oriented church, with preference given to latter, namely, developing a church-wide vision for university-oriented ministry

I would think you would have to figure out where [the vision for the university community] belongs in the DNA [of the church].<sup>78</sup>

It's hard for me to imagine doing [university-oriented church ministry] effectively without it occupying a pretty central role in the definition of the church. The reason I say that is that I think doing church-based university ministry means that the whole community needs to be touched and engaged by this. Otherwise you're just doing a parachurch ministry housed in a church, and I think you probably have to decide which way you're doing it. Is this a

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<sup>78</sup> Anonymous, interview.

church ministry to the university or is it really just a church-based parachurch ministry?<sup>79</sup>

You have to be okay with this uniqueness. You can't be all things to all people. You have to be okay with not having the same ministry with the church down the street. That's okay.<sup>80</sup>

- Juggle competing priorities, while making university-orientation more prominent

In terms of advice I would just say to people from the beginning, you must be multi-generational, and you must to the best of your ability while making it clearly known that you are a university-oriented congregation, preschoolers are still important to us. ... Nobody gets preferential treatment, but the fact is there's a college three blocks from here.<sup>81</sup>

I think part of it has to do with helping, as it were, the gown see the town, and the town see the gown, and presuppose in the context of the church setting at least that of course that each would be considered a priority for the other, right? So I guess it's that leadership challenge of wanting the position of taking people at their best, that of course people in the university community would be concerned about those not in the university community and of course those not in the university community would be concerned about those not in the university community. And sort of presupposing that, while you know that you can't really presuppose it, so partly what you're doing is trying to cultivate that. So I think, assuming the best of what the intentions are of each side of that divide for the other, sort of acknowledging that, referring to that, acknowledging in, let's say, in the hecticness of the opening weeks [of fall semester] when we're constantly focusing on invitations to students, etc., etc., etc., to say, "While we realize that of course many of you are not involved the university, we're so excited to be in a place where so many are." It's an acknowledgment in a way, that as an interpreter of the story you're telling that you realize there's a larger story, and right now you're doing a particularly focused job of trying to tell the university side of the story, and what it is that you're doing will be a help to them. But at the same time you're wanting to affirm and to acknowledge that you haven't forgotten those who are not in the university setting. And likewise there would then be other times when we would say, oh I don't know, maybe you would be encouraging people to come to let's say like a family ministry oriented thing, where you're aware that you're advertising something where, "Many of you aren't yet in a situation in life where family issues ... are really in view for you, but one of the great things about being a church in a university setting is that we have people that are both in university settings and beyond that, so all of you are invited to XYZ ... and that may not be your timing, but we're so glad that we

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<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>80</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, interview.

can offer both of those things,” for students let’s say, and things for those older than students. That kind of an interpretive dance, that I guess I’m just saying goes both ways.<sup>82</sup>

- Be attractational (“come and see”) as well as missional (“go and be”)

If you want to minister well to the university, it has to become part of the fabric of how you do things and I think you have to have asked questions of what are the “roads in” for university students and professors in to our church and what are the “roads in” for us to their community. And I think that there is a tendency to focus on one or the other for the churches. They either figure out how to try to make the church somehow more attractive to the demographic and then they make all these changes to worship or to structures, to be like, well, we’ll just make our church really attractive to this group and they will eventually show up, and they will become part of our community. So you’re pulling them out of their context and into your context. So I think that there’s a tendency for churches either to do that or to say we want to find out roads in and not think about like, once we found out roads into their community, to the university setting, like what are we actually inviting them into later. So I think you have to ask both sets of questions at the outset because I think the failure to do that means you’re potentially going to be ineffective on both fronts if you haven’t asked both sets of questions.<sup>83</sup>

- Be open and accepting, not antagonistic or patronizing

[A great value in the history of our church is] this ethos in which the university would be comfortable. It’s not viewed as an antagonistic thing, nor is it viewed as a patronizing thing, like “Oh, we have to reach the secular, liberal lost of the university.” We do have to reach the university. They are secular. They are lost. But sometimes I feel that evangelicalism is viewed with a certain kind of suspicion and sometimes that suspicion is rightly deserved. Because we oftentimes are suspicious of the influence of modernism and secularism, and therefore too reactionary and too inflexible in our responses. And so one of the pieces of advice is less tactical because tactical advice is going to vary from place to place, what’s going to work in [various cities and regions], these are going to be different. And tactical advice when it does work, you can get great advice from the business world or ministry manuals, and all kinds of things. The thing that I find that’s hardest is to create that kind of ethos so someone from the university is going to be at home, where you’re comfortable with the complexity of life, not fearful of the questions. By no means does this mean you are wishy-washy. You have to have convictions, but you have to differentiate between the essential truths that you need to

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<sup>82</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, interview.

defend vigorously and the nonessential truths that you need to discuss charitably and just held open, loosely. And that ethos is the more fundamental issue and the harder to create.<sup>84</sup>

[Develop] your communication style, not just communication style, but in your belief, a real appreciation for the university, as opposed to, "a bastion of bad ideas. We've got to save those poor folks." I think that's very wise and legitimate. Not just saying you think that but don't say it.<sup>85</sup>

- Be near the university community, and listen

I think that probably the best advice would be to draw near the community, to achieve that proximity that is the first step, to get to know the community, to be part of it, to listen. To hear its needs, but to hear Christ's hope for that community in the midst of its needs.<sup>86</sup>

You have to go to build a relationship and listen and understand and care and respect. ... I think people need to do, I've done this with our [church leadership] in the last couple of years, a cultural exegesis. They have to go out into the community and just begin to observe and interact and understand to really step into the university culture and seek to understand it and care about it and not caricature it. ... So I think being able to go into the community in an open way, clear about what you think and believe, committed to the core things of the gospel and the things we know to be true and to transcend times and cultures, but also to be open to really be understanding and respecting and is truly seeking to understand the challenges of being a university student in this moment which is different in many ways than it was.<sup>87</sup>

If a church wants to be a university-oriented church, the pastors have to find the appropriate connections on campus.<sup>88</sup>

You learn how to navigate [engaging with the university community]. It's not that you have to have advanced degrees or go through university life, in order to reach the university. But I do think that rather than presuming you have the answers to their questions, to really walk with them long enough to understand what their questions truly are, to visit people in their labs, see what they struggle with, sit in on classes, share the kinds of challenges that they're facing. And so again, rather than presuming that I know the Bible and I know what the answers are for them, to walk with people in the life of the university. In the same way again I use tragedy as the analogy. You just can tell when someone has it as a part of his or her being, an ability to walk with

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<sup>84</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous, interview.

you through tragedy because they've been there before either directly or vicariously in a way that has been sensitive.<sup>89</sup>

I think you have to go in, and you have to be a learner of where you are, and so you really have to listen to people. I think going in with perspective that you have something for them, which is true in that you are going intentionally in with the Gospel, but ... being willing to listen to them and do things on their terms, and not be in such a hurry to change their world from their perspective.<sup>90</sup>

- Find common concerns with the university community

I think part of the way of engaging people now is to find places of shared concern and interest in partnering with each other. There's lots of university students that value compassion and care for the world and how we enter into that care and concern for the world in a common way, whether we are all in Christ or not, is a way to build those relationships and to naturally begin to talk about what motivates us to do what we're doing.<sup>91</sup>

Send your [college age] kids [to the university]. Because then the families will naturally welcome more college students.<sup>92</sup>

- Adjust to the culture of students

You have to look at your weekend services, your web presence, your social media and all that, through the lens of a college student, and say, "If a college student lands on my twitter feed, my Facebook presence, my website, and my weekend service, is this a place where they're going to feel like, 'I can be at home here'?" ... Most of the people who go to our church went to our website first. So you're never going to reach the college students. If they can't find you online, you don't exist.<sup>93</sup>

I think you need to exegete what kind of campus is this. ... The people here [in our community] are so largely pessimistic ... So any church planter should be doing that with their culture anyway. So don't forget to exegete the campus along with the rest of the surrounding community.<sup>94</sup>

- Find out how to complement the parachurch ministries on campus

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<sup>89</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>91</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>93</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous, interview.



I really encourage you to start with some community folks, and then get to know the parachurch, assuming there's parachurch ministry. If there's a campus with no parachurch that's thriving, then that's a different context. But get to know the parachurch staff and what they're doing, and you figure out how to serve those students as a church. And to partner. ... I think the experience of the parachurch is a healthy experience. I think they're the ones that God has blessed to kind of be the missionary arm of the church on campus, and [then seek] to bless [that ministry], but to realize that there are shortcomings with it that I've seen. And to partner then, to fill out what the student experience is. They need a local church that has community and its interaction. ... If they're going to be a university-oriented church, to do the missionary process, get to know what God's already doing on campus. Partner with that as much as possible. What's your niche in that? As opposed to coming with the clear blueprint of, "This is who we are and hope students come."<sup>95</sup>

- Be holistic, not just intellectual

[Focus on the whole of the] Gospel which is very holistic in terms of the person, so it's engaging mind, it's engaging heart, it's engaging hands, and it's keeping those things in a healthy tension. I've been involved in somewhat university-oriented churches which are very good at the head stuff, but are horrible at the heart and hands which you can see happening pretty easily, but ultimately that's really defeating. They attract people at first, but it's tough to sustain over the long run because they'll sense that you're just missing something very important.<sup>96</sup>

To be able to say that we are more than our ideas though ideas are important. Trying to figure out how to be a university church that is able to engage the community with ... being able to step into the debate about what life is about, what the world is about, and to do that thoughtfully is really important, but I think ... we don't just want to be brains on sticks. We are a whole people and how do we engage the whole of who we are while we try to do it with intellectual integrity?<sup>97</sup>

- Pray and take risks. In the respondent's words, "A lot of prayer and be willing to fail. It's true of everything."<sup>98</sup>
- "Count the cost" before you begin, because it can be costly

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<sup>95</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>98</sup> Anonymous, interview.

When I think about churches that want to actively minister to that group of people, ... there's a sense of counting the cost initially: "What is this actually going to mean?" Because it's one of those things where it seems like a really good idea at first, until you realize all the challenges that you face. So like, "What is the cost of this?" and seeing it as a long-term commitment.<sup>99</sup>

Patience, perspective, and perseverance. ... I'm so glad, if we were given nothing else, the perspective when we came here to plant a church was ... we are coming here to die here, for this purpose.... You really can't be in a hurry, and it's going to take a long time, and I think that perspective that isn't like, "We have to get this thing up and running in 2 years or else we're done." I think that would have been such pressure it would have killed us. I think that perspective really helped.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to many of these thoughts that emphasized how university-oriented church ministry has unique challenges, one respondent put a heavy emphasis on *not* changing what you do for the sake of the university. Be the church, he said, like any church would, just be close physically to the university community so that students can actively be involved:

I just really believe in not offering college-specific programming at your church in place of what you would normally call a member to do. I really believe the best thing we can give to college students is the opportunity to participate in something that isn't college oriented, and that calls them to responsibility and accountability, and offers them a window into what it will look like to live when they are 35 or 40. To structure into the way that we do our life organic opportunities for them to be invested in by people who are older than them, and for them to invest in people that are younger than them. So, that's my biggest advice. Just be the church. That's what people need. I don't think that being a university church should, as tempting as it might be, I don't think it should encourage us to do anything other than the main thing that healthy churches have always done. The strategy is in doing that close to people who are in the university, but not in changing what you do. ... The goals and the methods say the same. The only thing that might change is the way that you might apply and the way that you speak, and maybe the depth to which you are able to going into theological ideas changes, but the fact that you are going into theological ideas should be true no matter where you are.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>101</sup> Anonymous, interview.



## Advice for Existing Churches that Want to Become More University-Oriented

The primary message specifically for existing churches is that becoming more university-oriented as a church is not a small change. As described here, being a university-oriented church is a much more significant proposition than being a church that has a university ministry. Being a university-oriented church takes significant commitment from the senior pastor, from the rest of leadership, and from the congregation:

I would think it's a pretty uphill climb [for an existing church to become university-oriented]. But it would depend on factors that could really influence it. So I would say it depends on the depth of the senior pastor's commitment to this. It would depend upon, is there anywhere in the leadership a really significant core of lay leaders that sees this as primary or definitional? And then depending on that, how much total congregational leverage can this gain, in other words, how much is the church really interested in encouraging this, or how much is it really just seen as an outreach from the church as opposed to part of the identity of the church? So I think you can get there but I think ... [you have to have] the discussion, "Before we do anything, are we prepared under God to basically say, we're in this for the long haul? We're not just doing this as a kind of superficial experiment." ... So I think that, like with the university, I would think, you're going to at least make much more significant headway, and this is probably true of any ministry, and it's certainly true of something like the university, if it's in some ways a long, slow commitment. It's not a fast, flashy kind of thing that you're doing and so I think another way of testing how deeply the church really wants to move in this position, could it really imagine making a, let's say, a staffing commitment, or a priority commitment, or an overall budget commitment, or an overall length of commitment that would reflect the seriousness of this [the respondent earlier had mentioned 10 years], so that we'll truly be able to give ourselves to this, because there's not going to be another one of these kind of levels of priorities that's going to come along tomorrow.<sup>102</sup>

Another described the significance of commitment from leadership itself:

It's got to be the value system from the leadership. I think what it felt like to me [as an associate pastor at a church that expressed interest in being university-oriented] was, we wanted a college ministry so, "Let's find someone to do it," which was me. And I just ran into... whenever I asked for things, they were very kind about it like let's make sure to make it happen.

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<sup>102</sup> Anonymous, interview.

But it wasn't woven into the culture, and I don't know how to do that. It's got to start from the top. The leadership has to own that. It's got to be a core value for the setting of the vision and the mission and programming.<sup>103</sup>

### Advice for Church Plants Beginning with this Vision

Three of the respondents were church planters while the rest were not. As such, several specifically expressed that they lacked the expertise and experience of church planters and thus their advice in this arena was quite limited. The advice reported here is not for planting churches in general but rather it is focused on university-oriented church ministry. Furthermore, there is significant overlap with the advice offered to all churches, although the comments have an extra intensity for church planting. The key categories were:

- Understand your context: One key issue mentioned was the difference between a “college town” which can be seen as a smaller city dominated by one major school, and a city that has multiple universities as well as multiple other significant influences. Other issues included the need to understand the personality of the local university community and the questions that are most prominent for people in that community.
- Locate the church close to campus:

Obviously being very close [to campus] helps. In an urban setting ... physical proximity is everything. Like you if you are 2 miles away from someone [in this part of this city], that might as well be 50 miles away.<sup>104</sup>

One [great asset] is we're just across the street. Location is huge. We get a ton of students who just walk to worship services on Sunday mornings.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>104</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>105</sup> Anonymous, interview.

- Take seriously the cost, including long term financial issues, especially if you want to reach students:

Because student population is so transient, [church plants focused on college students in this city] have really, really needed the support of those who are permanent. There really has to be support and collaboration with the more permanent members of the church. ... Because it's a mission that can be really draining, a lot of giving. Even financially.<sup>106</sup>

- Be willing to take time:

Don't do any program for a least a year. Go meet people. Go make relationships. Pray. Listen. But don't try and do programs right away. Just build relationships, listen, and pray.<sup>107</sup>

[As quoted above] Patience, perspective, and perseverance. ... I'm so glad, if we were given nothing else, the perspective when we came here to plant a church was ... we are coming here to die here, for this purpose.... You really can't be in a hurry, and it's going to take a long time, and I think that perspective that isn't like, "We have to get this thing up and running in 2 years or else we're done." I think that would have been such pressure it would have killed us. I think that perspective really helped.<sup>108</sup>

- Be intergenerational:

I think the challenge of planting a church in a university community would be to have an ultimate intergenerational vision because I do think that's one of the things that a church uniquely can bless the college students with, which is relationships outside their own generation.<sup>109</sup>

I really do not believe you can have a university-oriented church that is not multi-generational. I just don't think it's sustainable. I don't know where the money comes from. I don't know where the structure comes from. And so the beauty of having a 100-year-old congregation that already embraces all that stuff, means you have funding, you have a foundation, you have everything that frankly the university student is not going to bring.<sup>110</sup>

- Create a presence on campus:

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<sup>106</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>107</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>110</sup> Anonymous, interview.

I would simply make sure they have at least a life group or two on campus comprised of college students. Use [your] weekend services [wherever they are] but do smaller groups on campus, just some sort of active presence on campus is essential. Otherwise you just become a place that they go to church. ... If you're planting a church, and you intentionally want that, start your service on campus with people from off campus. Just that communicates a ton. Instead of asking the college students to come off campus, you ask the people on your core team to meet on campus.<sup>111</sup>

### **Other Issues Prompted by Respondents**

In the course of the interviews, respondents brought up a number of other issues that were not part of the original protocol. Those issues are highlighted here.

#### *Wrestling with the Question of Moving a Church Farther Away*

As mentioned above, many churches had wrestled with the question of whether or not to move farther away from campus because of the inherent limitations of being close. One of the churches in this study was specifically considering such a move even as we talked. Here is part of the description of their current thinking as described by the respondent, implying that the church believed that moving farther away would not inhibit its ministry to the university community:

As [our church] considers its location, it has considered: Distance, Cost, and Space. Currently the short distance [just across the street from several dorms] is a good thing, yet it seems that moving further away wouldn't be a big problem. Most students drive to church or ride [in our] van right now, so being 3.5 miles further away should make little difference. [The church has] looked at other churches further out, and the distance doesn't seem to have been a problem for them. Cost [where we are] is good now, and when you look further out [in time], it is still manageable. It would be more [expensive] to be closer. Space is the big problem. It seems that doing student family groups [as another way to engage with students] is a bigger good than a greater distance [away from campus] would be bad.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Anonymous, interview.

### *Worship Services Specifically for College Students*

As mentioned earlier, the question came up of whether or not churches should have worship services specifically for students. One respondent embraced the idea:

We have a worship experience on Wednesday night ... that is devoted exclusively to college-age students. [Having a separate worship service for students] is not a concern to us because we are more interested in seeing the kingdom of God expand than we are in seeing [our church] expand. And for me, that's two different issues. If we're talking about people who are going to be members of [our] church then that, in my opinion, is a defeatist attitude when it comes to a university church, is to have members. [Interviewer question: So the Wednesday night service is "church" for these students?] Absolutely. ... That is their week of church and we do have, from that we do have freshman Bible studies that we promote. Again they would meet on campus. They meet somewhere else. So it's the ministry to these kids that trumps, do we want them to go through the formal membership process? No, it's the ministry. But there again, it doesn't pay. We don't take up an offering. That's not what that's about. So you have that push and that rub, that we constantly keep before people the costs of being a university church. Is it expensive in terms of having the right kind of staff? [His body motion expressed, "Of course!"] But here's the other thing that we've benefited from. What they do bring. Here's what they do bring. They do bring energy. They do bring excitement. They bring a level of ... there's not really a good word ... a level of aliveness that the place is alive when you see hundreds of college students coming to worship. Man! That's exciting!<sup>113</sup>

In contrast, another respondent expressed regret about having a separate worship service that was primarily attended by students because of the separation it created between the students and the rest of the church. The church had started a "contemporary" worship service which met on Sunday evenings while the less contemporary services were on Sunday mornings:

[The contemporary service] actually grew to be the largest service that [the church] had. ... But I think one of the things it did is it pulled a ton of college students out of the larger life of the church and put them in the evening so there was less ongoing interaction and I think that was hard for [our church]. I think that it would have been better, actually, to do this service in the morning. I mean there were advantages doing it in the evening. It was advantageous to families who wanted to be away for the weekend, etc. But

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<sup>113</sup> Anonymous, interview.

I've been wondering, it's because there was less regular normal interaction with university students, that that sort of weakened our commitment to them and ... in the last three years we added a contemporary worship service in the morning which did have its own impact on the evening, drawing people back in the morning, there are more university students involved [on Sunday morning] and I think that's probably the right direction. But I think there needs to be deliberate leadership done to lead our congregation back to more comprehensive engagement.<sup>114</sup>

### *Concern about Students Drifting from Church after Graduation*

A concern that was raised by several respondents was the tendency of students to drift away from the church after they graduated from college. Following is a representative statement both of the concern and of one strategy for addressing it:

And these two partnerships [between our church and parachurch ministries] seem to be a very effective way of us supporting and accelerating [the parachurch] ministry, and also encouraging them to connect their students to a local church. One, they're learning during the college years the importance of the local church. And two, they're not falling prey to what actually happens in a lot of parachurch ministry, and I say this from having been on staff with [a parachurch ministry] myself, that a lot of students, they just never learned how to make that transition if they become a Christian or if they really start growing in their faith in the college years in a parachurch ministry, just never learned to do church, and after they graduate that don't get involved the church and they fade away from the faith. And it's unfortunately a much larger number of people doing that than we would ever want to be the case.<sup>115</sup>

Another church expressed a very similar concern about students drifting away from the church after college if their college connection with the Christian church was only through a campus ministry:

[We have come to realize] that the most profitable thing for a student involved even in campus ministry is that they wouldn't merely have a campus ministry experience during their college years, but that would be connected to the overall body of Christ, that that would produce the most healthy believers for the long haul. And having watched many of fellow students who had such a limited experience in their (spiritually speaking) to a "just campus" ministry, and thinking that's what church life would be like, and then they went to engage in a church, and it wasn't like a homogeneous environment of a Friday

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<sup>114</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>115</sup> Anonymous, interview.



meeting every night of the week, and they had a hard time making the transition. And that affected the long term viability of their faith. [I] really, really believe that they needed both [campus ministry and intergenerational church ministry] so [our church is] never trying to enter into the campus world to redo what [parachurch ministries] are already doing but trying to support them, seeing the great value in what they were doing, but to partner with that. [The students] needed both, not just to come and be a student at a church but to come and really be a part of the body, have relational experiences and responsibilities.<sup>116</sup>

Several of the pastors in this study had previously been involved as staff in parachurch ministry. Here is how one described that earlier experience:

I'm coming out of, when I came here, I was just finishing up [many] years with [a parachurch campus ministry] so my heartbeat was students, but the decision to move [into church-based ministry] was seeing how students struggled, how the transition after college was so hard, and we weren't serving them. What use is this to serve them in parachurch ministry to have them just flounder [when they graduate]? Now I'm on both sides of the scheme and I think there's weaknesses that parachurch does that they could do better. I think [a way to improve is to strengthen] it's connection to the local church. But the church too could do things to revive kind of like a solid intergenerational church experience that prepares them for the rest of life after college. So that's what we're trying to do. That's what we call the "real world faith," connect here, connect out there. That's kind of our motto. So whether it's "adopt a student," where students get adopted in the [church] families. We've got, I think we've finally figured out the format for "graduating senior seminars" that we provide in the spring that bring in young adults from our church to talk about the transitions, and so it's less teaching, because they get enough teaching, like talking head teaching from campus ministry, so it's much more conversations with young adults, saying, "What's it like to build your own budget or find a job?" And I am actively the liaison, so I kept a piece of my time with [parachurch ministry], so I'm still staff, technically, so I am actively talking with the parachurch staff to say, "How can we build bridges?" I go to their retreats, and where they'll let me, and they've been very welcoming, I'll lead seminars for graduating seniors, and our seminars for graduating seniors are not just for our students. We've made it really clear you don't have to come to [our church] to come to these.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>117</sup> Anonymous, interview.



### *Getting Closer to the University Community Culturally*

One area of *closeness* between the church and the university in the definition used in this study related to the culture of these groups. Several respondents described different aspects of the gap that sometimes existed between the common conversations and assumptions within many churches and what was happening in the university community:

[As a recent graduate] I think I have more of a student perspective. One of the reasons I really wanted to come to [this church], I could tell from the preaching that there was a cultural closeness. And just the way that mostly [the pastor] was presenting messages and the kind of world view he stepped into and then challenged when he was preaching. It was a worldview that I was really resonating with as someone who was living in it in the university culture. ... Some of the defeater beliefs that I was wrestling with and thinking about, [the pastor] was addressing and stepping in, you know, giving credibility to, before talking about how the Gospel addresses that. I noticed a couple other churches that were farther away from [the university community], they didn't enter into that worldview as much. It was just more of like biblical teaching, and there wasn't quite the sympathy with the contemporary worldview of the academy that I was living in. So that was one of the things that really attracted me as a student.<sup>118</sup>

[To be effective as a church in the university community, the church has to take] the questions that academic setting, the culture of the university are asking, seriously. ... I think that is something I've really appreciated about, I'm going to go to the preaching because that it is the public proclamation of the ideas, so you see that most evidently. You're just taking that seriously. You're really trying to enter into the world we're in, and you're trying to grapple with it, kind of first labor is the labor of the heart: To really try to understand first the culture and first try to understand the university.<sup>119</sup>

Another respondent described it this way:

We talked a little bit about politically, we have to be open. We're not a Republican church. You'd be dead if you were a Republican church! We have a lot of Democrats here. You're not going to hear [a Republican perspective] from the pulpit. You're not going to hear that from leadership. So in terms of being all-inclusive, what we mean is, we have to be as open as we can be

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<sup>118</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>119</sup> Anonymous, interview.

racially, culturally, as open and as sensitive as we can so as to have the opportunity to share the story of God.<sup>120</sup>

Another spoke of the frustration he had as a parachurch staff member in the past when the parachurch ministry would encourage students to attend churches:

We were very conscious of pushing our students into churches but those churches often had very little sensitivity or embodied concern for those universities, so we were sort of shoving them over a wall. Here, what you and I are talking about is pulling the wall down, and that's a much greater invitation it seems to me.<sup>121</sup>

*Seeking to Influence the Culture, not Just to Rescue Students from It*

A few respondents mentioned the vision of shaping the culture of the university community, not just rescuing students from it. For example,

But if in a deeper way the commitment of engagement is not just at that level [of ministering to individuals], but really of those things plus the deeper intellectual paradigms of the university, in other words, we want to actually be culture instigating partners in debates about the nature of reality, well then, that's going to require not this sort of easier complementarity that we've just described, but a deeper, broader commitment of the whole community.<sup>122</sup>

Another expressed the historic vision of his church to shape the culture of its community:

It was initially formed because of the growing liberalism and Unitarian movements within [this region]. ... [This church] was formed in response to the fact that many of the churches in [this city] relinquished an orthodox, Trinitarian faith. So [the church] was formed as a very distinct attempt to counteract that, and to present an orthodox, historic Christianity, centered on the bible, the trinity, etc. ... It was put in its current location because it wanted to be at the heart of commerce so smack dab in the middle of [the city].<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>122</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>123</sup> Anonymous, interview.

### *Having Those in the University Community Bless the Church*

One respondent spoke of finding ways to have the university community serve the local church, so that the beneficial interaction between the university and the church truly is a two way street:

There's another piece ... that is on my mind here at [our church] and that is an invitation to draw a university and its resources into the ministry of the church as well. ... It seems that a university church has an opportunity if it's positioned as [this vision] described to speak the Gospel into that University community, the students, the staff, the faculty, to minister to those parties, but also in a way to be ministered to by the university because it has people and resources who acknowledge Jesus Christ and to have something to say in the context of the church that kind of grows out of their academic vocation. And it also seems that the people in their learning within the university that do not acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ but through the common grace of God have something to offer us and so I mentioned earlier about, how can we lower the wall between the church and the academy? I imagine kind of bi-directional interaction there.<sup>124</sup>

He went on to describe how faculty who were also part of the church had taught within the church regarding their academic expertise. In this way, they truly served the church from the academic side of their lives.

### *The Importance of Faculty and Graduate Students*

A common reaction to a mention of university ministry was for respondents to assume that the focus was on undergraduate students. In contrast, one respondent placed greater emphasis on ministry among graduate students and faculty:

I think reaching faculty and graduate students, if there are graduate students, is really, really key. Personally I think one of the most important part of university ministry, if there is a graduate student component to the population, is actually graduate student ministry because it exists in between the undergraduate and graduate ministry, and it sets up the terms of future faculty. So the more the undergraduate, but especially graduate students, can gain this sort of a vision, the more they can go on to be faculty ... and can actually really engage the university in a different way because they really have a deep

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<sup>124</sup> Anonymous, interview.

sense of confidence in the Gospel and a greater readiness to consider the integration of the Gospel into that unique academic, intellectual setting. So faculty and graduate students are an incredibly important part of the strategy. And tricky, meaning that they're often deeply formed already, that in a way it can be pretty challenging to see how people in those settings can actually be enabled to do their work [of the Gospel in the university setting].<sup>125</sup>

### *Choosing to Stay in a Challenging Community*

In the interest of painting a richer picture of the kinds of challenges that a university-oriented church encounters, following is a description of a church that will be named because one could easily work out its identity given the details of this story. The church is First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, located just a block away from the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. The church encountered incredible challenges because of the tumult in Berkeley during the 1960s, yet the church decided to stay. In fact, that tumult reinforced its commitment to the vision of embracing the university community. Here is how a respondent described it:

Well, I think, I just thought of a little detail which behind the decision to build the new sanctuary, the bigger decision was whether to stay in Berkeley on that corner. There was a riot in Berkeley every 13 days for four years, [there was even] a month when you could only get to church in the arms of the National Guard because Reagan had declared court-martial law on Berkeley. The membership of the church in 1962 was 3,000, and by 1970 it was 600. So there was a tremendous amount of flight, and a tremendous sense of, "This is a war zone!" or "This is chaos! Let's move away from the university." And there was a piece of property that the church was being offered that was away from campus, nearer the freeway, etc., and the church said, "No. No." Their first decision was, "No. We're going to stay here". The sanctuary got condemned [as not being earthquake safe], and they decided not only, "[We] are going to stay here," but "We're going to tear down this old sanctuary with its stone walls, and we're going to build a clear glass-walled sanctuary." So ... there was kind of a whole series of decisions in that season all of which in some way or another contributed to a deeper ownership of our being a university church. It was an intensification of saying, "No, we are definitely here and we're definitely not moving especially given that it's a war zone and

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<sup>125</sup> Anonymous, interview.

there's chaos." And the great gesture of that was to stay and build a sanctuary, etc. I think that was big.<sup>126</sup>

The glass-walled sanctuary was an intentional effort to reduce the psychological distance between the congregation and the people in the university community:

We built a sanctuary with three glass walls in the middle of a rock throwing melee in the streets of Berkeley saying that, "No, we want you to see what's going on here and we're staying." And a lot of people didn't have the stomach for that in the end of the 60s.

[Building the glass walled sanctuary] itself was a way of moving closer to the university at a time in the late 60s and early 70s when the church had a stone sanctuary and stain-glassed windows, and the world outside was invisible to those inside, but not spiritually, just that meaning physically that it was invisible. So I think moving closer came about in part by realizing if you're sitting in a clear glass-walled sanctuary where whatever is happening around you in Berkeley, might be happening also therefore in the sanctuary was a way of moving closer. And I think it was such a common thing that people would say, "Oh yeah, I've walked by that church for two years and would look in and see all those people and wondered what it was about. Eventually I decided I was willing to give it a go myself." So I think in a way, one of the greatest actual advantages is simply that decision so long ago to locate on that corner and later to build that sanctuary.

#### *Senior Pastors of University-Oriented Churches*

A very significant question for university-oriented churches to address is what kind of person is best suited to be a senior pastor of a university-oriented church. While that question was not specifically a part of the interview protocol for this study, several respondents did talk about their approach to answering it. As such, the following points are initial answers that need to be explored through further research to confirm, clarify, and expand upon them.

The most important characteristic described by participants, particular in the highly academic settings, was that this person must have the "intellectual horsepower" to be able to engage with people in the academic environment. There must be the ability to

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<sup>126</sup> Anonymous, interview.

understand and appreciate the issues that are prominent in the university, to relate those ideas to the Gospel, and to communicate the Gospel into that context in a clear and compelling way: (Some of these quotes were included earlier and are repeated here for clarity on this issue.)

[In addition to core theological convictions, you must consider] their gifts that they might bring. I think [you need to consider] the fluency with how you would take orthodoxy and seek to communicate it to the [university community]. So it would need to be somebody who has the fluency in being able to do that to some degree and to do it pretty readily, flexibly, I suppose creatively.<sup>127</sup>

We want someone with this sort of intellectual horsepower to be able to engage the university. Somebody who had a heart for the university as well.... I think it's because people [in this church], even if they're not connected with the university, they want a thoughtful faith and because they have hired pastors in the senior position who are able to articulate a thoughtful, compelling Christian worldview.<sup>128</sup>

One respondent specifically mentioned the necessity in his context of the senior pastor having a Ph.D. while others spoke of the ability to "hold one's own" in the academic world:

Having someone that is an excellent teacher, not just a speaker, but an excellent biblical expositor is extremely high priority. Someone who was able to carry his or her weight in the university setting is either a spoken or an unspoken assumption which will in turn mean a certain pedigree educationally. Frankly I would find it very difficult to imagine [this church] ever hiring someone without a Ph.D. as the senior pastor. In fact, most of our staff, a lot of them, are pursuing or have Ph.D.s themselves.<sup>129</sup>

Also mentioned by several respondents was the necessity of having an attitude of humility as well as confidence. A senior pastor must not be intimidated by people in the academic setting who boldly express ideas that are actually or apparently in conflict with Christianity. At the same time, the pastor must also not be judgmental of them. He must

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<sup>127</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>128</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>129</sup> Anonymous, interview.



be able to articulate a Christian perspective without exhibiting an “us and them” way of thinking or a patronizing attitude.

A third qualification mentioned by one respondent in a less highly academic setting was the ability to relate to students. The pastor, he said, needs to have the energy and personality to engage with students in a compelling way, along with the ability to converse with the president of the university:

[When hiring a senior pastor at this church,] I think they were looking for someone that they would feel comfortable and pleased that they could take the president of their university to lunch with, but at the same time I think they were looking for a guy who could stand down here and scream at [students in a positive way] and lead a parking adventure down here with shorts on and a T-shirt and so, yeah I think clearly in their minds they were looking for someone that they knew had to have a way to connect, and it is important that that person be educated, and it was important that that person would be able to work within an academic community but to understand his own particular faith tradition.<sup>130</sup>

In terms of other qualities, five of the senior pastors at churches included in this study specifically had worked as ministry staff in parachurch ministries connected with college campuses prior to serving as pastor. In addition, three of the pastors had attended their current churches when they were students and then later returned to serve as pastor.

In terms of pastor tenure, further study is required since the number of churches included in this study is small. That being said, the data suggest that longer tenures might be more common in churches that have sustained effectiveness in university-oriented environments than the national average tenure. In this study, the average length of service by senior pastors at the churches in this study was 9.7 years. That is in contrast to the national average of 7.7 years.<sup>131</sup> Three of the churches currently have the founding pastor serving as senior pastor; these churches have ages of one year, about ten years, and about

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<sup>130</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>131</sup> [http://greymatterresearch.com/index\\_files/Job\\_Changes.htm](http://greymatterresearch.com/index_files/Job_Changes.htm), accessed on December 27, 2011.



twenty years. Some of the churches reported long tenures by some pastors, including two pastors that had served over thirty years, and five that had served twenty or more years. The lengths of these pastorates suggests that longer service is important for the effectiveness of churches in general, and for the effectiveness of a university-oriented church in particular, but again, this claim is only a suggestion that requires further study.

### *The Vision of a University-Oriented Church*

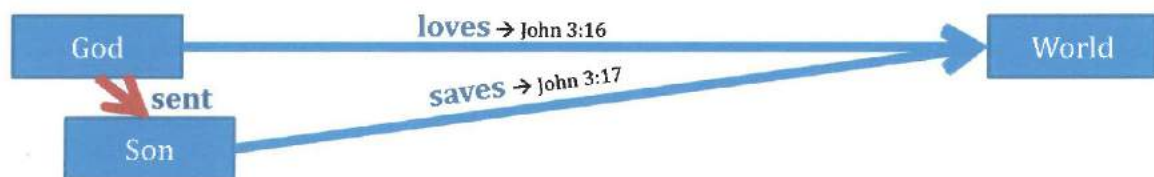
A prominent theme from all of the respondents was that vision is an essential quality of a university-oriented church, and by its nature, vision can only be as helpful as it is specific and clear. Without specificity and clarity, the vision of the church cannot guide it in its decisions about how it enacts its ministry. Resources, including the whole range of assets such as people, time, money, space, and so on, will inevitably be insufficient to address everything that the church could be doing. Repeatedly in this study, respondents identified the necessity of being able to allocate limited resources so as to pursue the highest priorities of the church. Furthermore, if the church endeavors to be everything to everyone, it will likely fail to be anything to anyone. It is the vision of the church that guides it in allocating limited resources to fulfill what the church decides is most important to it. That in turn guides it in implementing its ministry in a way that makes it increasingly effective with its chosen target population.

Given the significance attributed by participants to vision, what follows is an effort to make sense of the type of vision exhibited by these university-oriented churches. In the broadest sense, the local church is to fulfill the vision of being the body of Christ for its community, yet such a broad vision is unable to guide the church in its specific actions. Accordingly, the question that churches must answer, and that they inevitably do

answer in their daily actions, is this: what is the specific vision of *this* church?

Unfortunately churches have “the common habit of neglecting what makes a congregation unique and gravitating toward adopting programs and mind-sets that work elsewhere.”<sup>132</sup> According to Mancini, when churches fail to understand their own giftedness and place in God’s Kingdom, their effectiveness is greatly reduced.

To understand two choices that a local church has to make in determining its own unique vision, consider the following series of figures. The vision of the church is built upon the foundational truths stated in John’s Gospel. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”<sup>133</sup>



**Figure 26: God Sends the Son to Save the World**

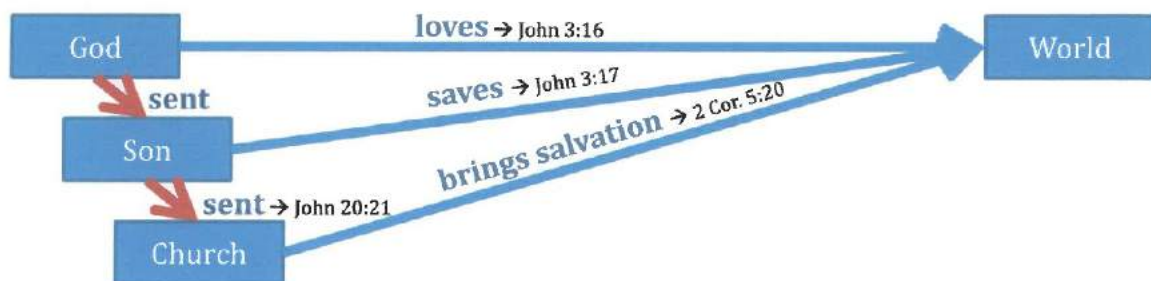
As depicted in Figure 26, God loved the world so much that He sent His Son to save the world. As described in Chapter 2, when God made the world, it was very good, and yet that world rebelled against God. Rather than abandon that world, God’s response was to move toward His wayward creation that had moved away from Him, and to give His Son to bring restoration.

Another important aspect of the world which God created is that He chose to make humanity in His image. One part of this image of God in people means that people

<sup>132</sup> Will Mancini. *Church Unique*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 9.

<sup>133</sup> John 3:16-17.

are a central means by which God's purposes are fulfilled in the world. Even though humanity was also central to the rebellion against God in the world, God did not abandon this role for mankind. Accordingly, in terms of the love of God for the world as expressed through His Son, God continued to choose to enact His will in the world through people, in this case, through the Church. This surprising choice is stated in Jesus' commissioning of His disciples, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.'"<sup>134</sup>



**Figure 27: The Son Sends the Church to Save the World**

Figure 27 depicts this relationship between God's sending of the Son, and the Son's sending of the church. How the Church brings salvation is obviously fundamentally different from how the Son brings salvation. The Son purchased that salvation with His life, death, and resurrection. The Church brings salvation by announcing that salvation (as well as by living out that salvation) and pleading with the world to respond to that invitation from God. "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."<sup>135</sup>

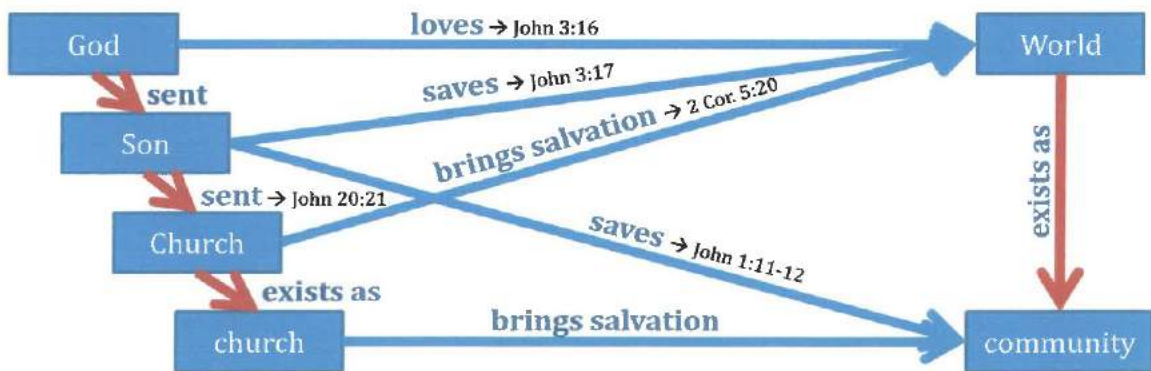
As is implied by the capital letters for World and Church in the above diagrams, the focus of this discussion thus far has been on the calling of the universal Church to

<sup>134</sup> John 20:21.

<sup>135</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.



save the World as a single entity. The reality is that the Church exists as a collection of local churches, and the World exists as a collection of local communities as shown in Figure 28. In contrast, the Son saves the World through His sufficient sacrifice for all while He also brought salvation to a specific community by living among them. Local churches, however, are limited in that they can only bring salvation to particular communities. The church exists as a group of individuals in a particular place and time, speaking a specific language or limited set of languages, expressed in a particular culture or limited set of cultures. The local community also exists as a group of individuals who are similarly situated in a particular place and time, with particular languages and cultures. The Church fulfills its commission to bring salvation to the World only as specific churches fulfill their commissions to bring salvation to particular communities.



**Figure 28: The Local Church Brings Salvation to Local Communities**

The first choice, then, that a church has to make is what community it will endeavor to reach. Certainly the characteristics of the local church restrict the range of possibilities in which that church can be effective in bringing salvation. One approach that a church can take is to determine which part of the world it most naturally fits and then to make its vision to reach that community. That community might be defined by language, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, family status, and so on.

Another approach is to identify a community that is different from the church in one or more characteristics yet is one that has limited access to the Gospel and is one that the church has some ability to serve and wants to reach. For example, many churches have identified a people group in another country as a community it has sought to reach, primarily through supporting missionaries and/or churches in that community and through periodic mission trips from the church in the States. However the choice is made, inevitably each church is living out a choice of the community it seeks to reach, whether the choice is stated or not, and even whether that choice is intentional or not. That is, the way the church allocates its resources, the actions the church takes, and the ways in which the church enacts its ministries will position it to be most effective with a particular group of people in the world.

Without an intentional choice otherwise, the local church is likely to be positioned best to reach people who are just like the people who are already in the church. In other words, the church ends up not fulfilling its mission to bring salvation to a community that does not already have it. But beyond this narrowest sense, the most obvious local community that will be the mission of a church is that local community that is “closest to” the people of the church in various dimensions.

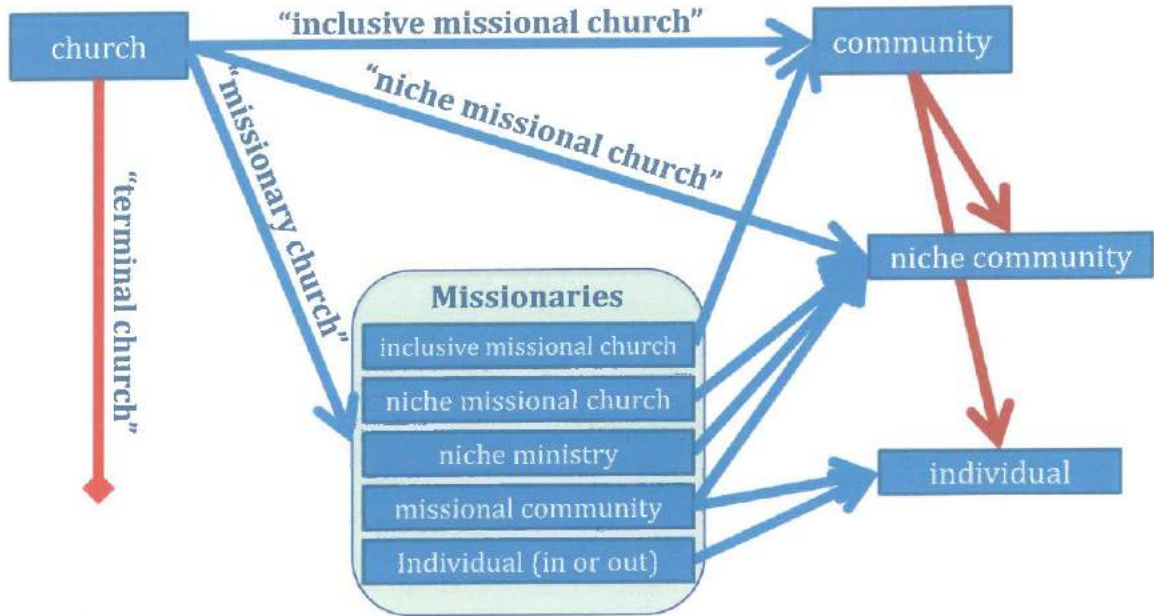
Yet the assumption, if not the explicit command of God, is that the church will intentionally move toward those people not yet embracing the Gospel. The Son has sent the church into the world just as the Father sent the Son into the world. As discussed in Chapter 2, God sent the Son into a world that was shrouded in darkness in order to shine His light. The Son was sent into that dark world, to dwell among its people in order to bring them salvation. The Church has also been sent into a dark world, similarly to dwell

among its people in order to bring them salvation. The task of each local church, then, is to determine which community of the world to which it is being sent. In other words, each local church has to answer this question: Which local community that is currently in darkness will we intentionally enter?

As demonstrated by respondents in this study, whether or not the vision is written down is a secondary issue. Some churches wanted it written down and displayed prominently while others felt no need to write it or were suspicious about efforts to declare what should be obvious from the church's actions. The real issue for each church is this: Has the church determined why it exists? Another way to ask the question is this: Why not close the doors of this church and encourage the Christians in the church to attend other churches nearby? If the answer is only because the people of the church would miss it, then that church exists for a purpose less than the purpose God gave it, for He gave the church to bring salvation to a dark world.

The focus of this study has been on those churches that identify the university community as the local community to which it is called. Yet the task of forming a vision for the church is the same for every church, whether it is university-oriented or not. The question is: what is the community that this church is striving to reach with the Gospel?

Once the church has identified its target community, it then must make a second decision, and that is to choose from several different models for ministry as depicted in Figure 29.



**Figure 29: Four Models of Local Church Ministry**

The choice among these models determines what the relationship is or will be between the church and the community it is reaching. The major choices are (moving counter clockwise from the bottom):

- being a terminal church
- being a missionary church
- being a niche missional church
- being an inclusive missional church

### A Terminal Church

The default position for a church is to be a “terminal church,” that is a church that is not actually taking the steps necessary to reach a community outside itself with the Gospel. The inevitable metaphorical gravity of the life of the church (to use an expression from one of the respondents in this study) will pull the church’s attention into itself unless there is a determined effort to look beyond itself and to serve those not currently a



part of its ministry. Such a church is *terminal* in the sense that the flow of God's grace does not go beyond it. In that sense, it is the "end of the line." It is also *terminal* in the sense that it is unlikely to be effective in truly serving even its own people since they are not being led into the work of God in the world, which is certainly a core part of the intended identity of God's people.

None of the respondents described their churches in a way that was consistent with being a terminal church. On the contrary, many talked about the specific decisions that they had made to be sure that they were actively pursuing ministry beyond themselves.

### A Missionary Church

The next option is to be a *missionary church*. Such a church supports others who serve as missionaries. That is, the church stands behind others who are the ones who bring salvation to a local community. The job of a *missionary church* is very important and, when done well, very demanding. It includes among other things the work of praying, of encouraging, of meeting needs (financial and otherwise), and of serving. Churches might choose to be *missionary churches* whether the community they seek to reach is on the other side of the world (in the traditional sense of foreign missions), or it is next door yet very different from the church itself (such as urban ministry supported by a suburban church), or it is next door and very similar to the church.

The kinds of ministries a *missionary church* might support can vary greatly. Starting at the bottom of the list, the missionaries supported by such a church can be individuals. In the traditional sense, these people travel to foreign lands to carry out their tasks, whether they are in vocational ministry or using innovative strategies such as

*business as mission*. But these missionaries can also be regular attenders of the local church who have a ministry of bringing salvation to others who are not specifically a part of the church's own ministry. So whether these people are inside the church or outside of it, and whether they are given financial support from the church or not, a *missionary church* can make its goal to support individuals in their efforts to bring salvation to a community in darkness.

The church might also support *missional communities*. Such communities are like traditional *small groups* found in many churches, yet they have a profound difference in their focus. That is, the focus of a *missional community* is on being missional in the sense that they live out the calling of bringing salvation (in a narrow and/or broad sense) to a local community:

Instead of doing groups for the sake of experiencing community, groups experience community for the sake of participating in God's redemption of creation.<sup>136</sup>

Each missional community has identified their unique mission within the larger community and meets regularly to eat, learn, pray and be together on mission, living out the Gospel in real and tangible expressions.<sup>137</sup>

Such missional communities identify some segment of some community, whether a set of particular individuals who are somehow connected with people in the missional community, or some segment of a community which they as a group can reach. Note that *missional community* as used here refers to an entity that is not intending to be a church. That is, it has a specific aspect of the ministry of the church which its people are seeking to fulfill, often to bring justice, to meet physical or social needs, or to proclaim the Gospel. The people in such a community might be from the same church or they could be

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<sup>136</sup> M. Scott Boren. *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community That Makes a Difference in the World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 23.

<sup>137</sup> "Missional Communities." *Soma Communities*.  
<http://tacoma.somacommunities.org/missionaries/missional-communities/> (accessed November 28, 2011).

from multiple churches. Whatever the makeup of *missional community*, a *missionary church* might choose to be a supporting church for such a group, whether that community is entirely made up of people from within the church or entirely made up of people disconnected from the church.

A *missionary church* might also choose to support a *niche ministry*. Often referred to as parachurch ministries, these ministries identify a niche community to which they seek to bring salvation. They tend to be larger and more formal than *missional communities*, but otherwise they are very similar. Often the target communities for *niche ministries* are identified by defining characteristics such as life situation (e.g., single parents, refugees), occupation (e.g., medical professionals), affiliation (e.g., students of a particular school), or socio-economic status (e.g., food banks). These ministries have identified a relatively non-diverse community and seek to bring salvation to people who fit the identified categories.

Note that these *niche ministries* as supported by a *missionary church* could be based either internally or externally. In terms of campus ministries, such an internal niche ministry is often referred to as a *college group*. The purpose of such an internal ministry generally is to support the students who are a part of the church, and if the group is missional, also to reach out to students at the same school as students of the church. An external *niche ministry* for a campus community might include groups like Cru (previously known as Campus Crusade for Christ) and InterVarsity, among others. These groups are generally supported by many churches and individuals, both locally and from far away, and their task is generally to encourage and support students in their growth in Christianity while also reaching out to those who are not Christian.

The final two options of *missionaries* listed in the figure that *missionary churches* might select to support are *niche missional churches* or *inclusive missional churches*. These ministries will be defined below.

Whatever the type of *missionary* selected, a *missionary church* fulfills its calling to bring salvation to a part of the world by supporting others in doing that task. The *missionary church* is the support system for others who are directly doing the task of bringing the Gospel to those who are not yet Christian. The church as a whole, however, is not engaging those beyond the church with the Gospel.

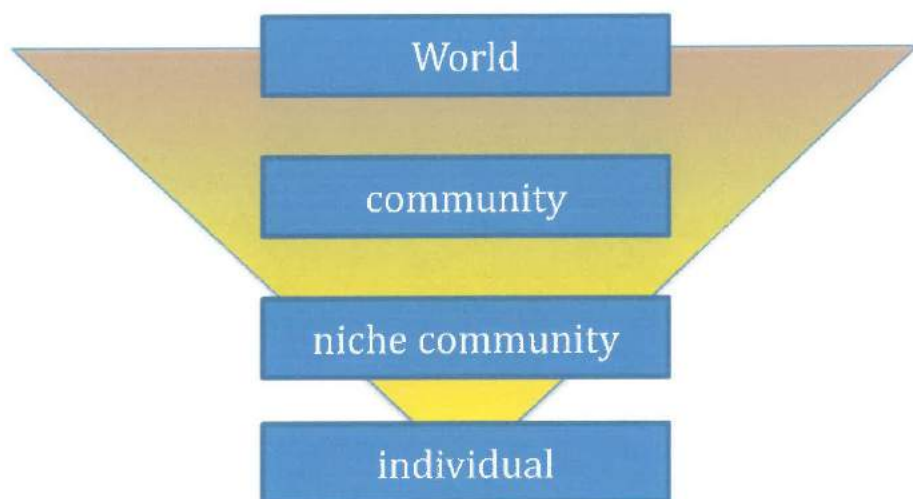
Among the participants in this study, one respondent described his church as treating the local campus ministries as the primary means by which the church reached the campus. That is, the ministry of the church complemented the campus ministries, doing what they did not (primarily, worship services and intergenerational ministry) while not doing what they did (primarily, evangelism and discipleship among students). This aspect of this church exhibits this vision of the church being a missionary church.

#### A Niche Missional Church

The final two categories are both examples of *missional churches*. A *missional church* is a church that chooses, as a body, to *be* the missionary body rather than primarily *supporting others* who are the missionaries. That is, the church as a whole enacts the vision of bringing salvation to the selected community. How it does each aspect of its ministry, from its worship services, to its small group ministries, to its children's ministries, and even to its business meetings, is significantly affected by its vision to reach a particular community. And as such, each person in the church is touched

by this vision. If people in the church do not have a heart for the selected community, they will likely not feel at home in that church.

The two categories of missional churches are *niche missional churches* and *inclusive missional churches*. The distinction between a *niche missional church* and an *inclusive missional church* is not necessarily obvious because they exist on a continuum of ministries, yet, particularly in the extremes, the differences are very important. As depicted in Figure 30, the continuum of groups of people ranges from the entire world of all people down to one particular individual. A church cannot reach the whole world. It can only reach individuals by reaching out to a group of people that includes those individuals, where this group shares a common culture. This culture can be defined by language as well as typical modes of thinking and interacting. Cultures can be identified that range from covering a whole hemisphere (e.g., Western culture) down to tens of people (e.g., a literary community in a particular school). How narrowly or how widely one defines this group of people determines the degree to which a church is an inclusive church or a niche church.



**Figure 30: Continuum of Groups of People**

On the narrower end of the spectrum, a *niche church* or ministry tends to identify its target population, its niche community, based on demographic categories such as race, age, disabilities, socio-economic status, or enrollment or employment status. Within the context of higher education, a typical niche church is a *student church*. The goal of the church is to be effective with that portion of the population that is enrolled as students. If a family shows up with young children, the church is not likely to make significant efforts to accommodate that family and its children since the focus is on people in a different demographic category. Another example of a niche church is the church in this study that targeted young people. The church did not focus on continuing to be a church for people as they age. In the words of the respondent, "When people [in this church] get older they have to make a choice: Are they on mission with you to reach the younger, or are they going to find another place to go to church? Because there are plenty of places that are targeting 40 and 50 year olds."<sup>138</sup>

On the broader end of the continuum of missional churches is the *inclusive missional church*, that is, a church that seeks to reach a broader range of people in the community. In the university setting, an inclusive church would welcome and seek to accommodate the needs and preferences of people ranging from infants through senior citizens, and of students as well as faculty, staff, graduates, and people who never attended college. What unites the people in an *inclusive church* is not a demographic characteristic but rather a more loosely defined culture that, in the case of a university church, is dominated by the academic community. If the grandparents of a student in the church visit, an *inclusive church* is more likely to have ministries that take the elderly into account whereas a *niche church* may welcome the elderly yet not have or even

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<sup>138</sup> Anonymous, interview.



intend to have anything for them. If people in an at-risk neighborhood near an *inclusive church* want to be a part of that church, it is more likely than a *niche church* to make adjustments to take their needs into account. Because it is not possible to be all things to all people, even an *inclusive church* has to draw boundaries regarding what range of people it can effectively welcome and serve, yet its tendency will be to be as broad as it can. One respondent described the relationship between being university-oriented and being inclusive this way:

[Our church is] interested in reaching the university as one part of its vision. And the reason why, with a multi-generational church, we really can't afford the luxury of saying we only do college kids here. No! We've got 100 preschoolers here. We've got to do preschoolers too. We have 90 senior adults. We've got to take care of senior adults. We've got people in nursing homes. We have to go to nursing homes. We have to go to assisted living facilities. And so we clearly are interested in the university in ways that we hope are evident.<sup>139</sup>

A helpful idea to guide a church is this definition of the term *people group*: "For strategic purposes, a people group is the largest group through which the gospel can flow without encountering significant barriers of understanding and acceptance."<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on identifying "the largest group" possible without inhibiting the flow of understanding and acceptance of the Gospel is significant. A *niche ministry* will tend toward narrowing its target in such a way that it does not exclude the key people it seeks to reach, while an *inclusive ministry* will tend toward broadening its reach as far as it can without inhibiting its ability to minister to an identified community.

One respondent in this study described his church as specifically targeting an age-based niche (eighteen to twenty-four year olds) making it naturally fit into the niche

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<sup>139</sup> Anonymous, interview.

<sup>140</sup> "What is a People Group?" *North American People Group Project*, <http://www.peoplegroups.org/faqs.aspx#WhatIsPG> (accessed December 1, 2011).



church definition. Others specifically said that they were working hard *not* to be a niche church. One respondent described the difficulty his church was encountering in pursuing an *inclusive* approach given the presence of *niche* churches close by them. One described the significance of the leadership task in his church to help the people be inclusive of those not like them, particularly in the *town* and *gown* categories. Six respondents specifically talked about the need they encountered to give greater emphasis to children's ministry in order to be effective as an inclusive church that is also university-oriented.

### Making a Choice

Obviously a church's choice among these four models (a terminal church, a missionary church, a niche missional church, and an inclusive missional church) has a significant impact on how it lives out its life as a church. From the perspective of this study, the ideal choice for churches in general would be to be both an *inclusive missional church* and a *missionary church*. Certainly being a *terminal church* does not reflect Jesus' commissioning of His disciples to bring salvation to the world. Of course God loves a church not just because it is a means to bring salvation to others, yet His vision for the church is that it would be a central part of enacting His love for the world. And certainly being a *missionary church* is modeled from the earliest days of the church in the sending out of people to take the Gospel to peoples far away from the congregation.

Being a *niche missional church* has its place, and yet such churches should be the exception rather than the rule. The ideal model for a church is that it embraces and demonstrates the strength of the diversity of a community. As described in Chapter 2, one of the consistent qualities of the church described in the New Testament is its diversity, and Jesus said that a key mark of His followers would be their love for each other, a love

that Jesus described as extending to those whom the world would not expect to be lovable. Certainly it would be easier to do ministry in the church if one approach or one set of programs or one choice on preferences would be largely effective for all people. Yet the assumption of the Bible is that the local church would be a diverse body, and that unity within this diversity is a good and pleasing thing that serves as evidence of God's work among them.

### Are University-Oriented Churches Niche Churches?

The question of whether or not university-oriented churches are niche churches is an excellent question. In short, they might be. The definition presented by this study of university-oriented churches, however, envisions them as being inclusive communities. In that definition, the key phrase is *multigenerational* as used originally, and *intergenerational* as used in the revised definition (to be discussed in Chapter 5). The most obvious aspect of being intergenerational is the intentional intermixing of people who do not fit into the same category, such as students and faculty. What unites the community is a sense of affiliation with the academic community as well as a culture that appreciates the values of that community rather than people's similarities to each other on typical demographic categories such as age, socio-economic status, or life situation.

On the other hand, if people not formally associated with a higher education institution (such as those who are not students) feel as though they are not valued in a church, then the church is closer to being a niche church. Similarly, if people who do not hold particular academic degrees, such as a doctorate, a bachelor's degree, or even a high school diploma, feel as though they do not belong and are not valued, then that community is serving a niche rather than being an inclusive community.

Again, the vision presented of university-oriented churches in this study is the vision of an *inclusive missional church* in which people from all different categories in life are welcomed into the same community.

### **Summary**

As is clear from this discussion, the respondents provided a great deal of insight on a wide range of issues of interest to those considering university-oriented church ministry. In the next chapter, these data are synthesized so as to address the question of what university-oriented church ministry looks like, and what decisions or actions can help make such a church more effective.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter provides a summary of the data discussed in detail in Chapter 4, and it draws conclusions based upon them. In particular, it seeks to answer the question of what makes a church either more or less university-oriented, both in its vision and in its effectiveness. Next steps for research and ministry are then described, and the chapter closes with some personal concluding observations.

#### **Clarify the Vision**

A prominent theme from all of the respondents was that vision is an essential quality of a university-oriented church. As described in Chapter 4, there are four broad categories of vision from which churches can choose. They are as follows.

- Being a terminal church: That is, the church serves the people of the church without an intentional effort to engage people outside the church with the Gospel.
- Being a missionary church: That is, that is the church seeks to engage people outside of the church with the Gospel by supporting others (whether inside the church or outside the church) who do the primary work of engagement.
- Being a niche missional church: That is, the church seeks to reach the community by focusing on a relatively narrow segment of the community generally defined by a demographic such as age or formal school affiliation.
- Being an inclusive missional church: That is, the church seeks to reach a particular part of the community while also being broadly inclusive of people with varying age, socio-economic status, or formal affiliation

A church that seeks to reach a university community can choose among the latter three models. As described in this study, a university-oriented church is an inclusive missional church. That is, a university-oriented church specifically seeks to reach a community that is dominated by one or more colleges or universities while also being inclusive of those people who are not directly connected with those schools, whether because of age, current life activity or employment, educational background, or other factors. Nevertheless, churches can have a significant impact on university communities by being either missionary or niche missional churches.

The bottom line is that churches that are relatively close to university communities ought to make an intentional choice about their stance toward those communities. A decision to be oriented toward the university should not be taken lightly, for such a decision has far-reaching implications for the church. At the same time, deciding not to engage a local academic community, or making such a decision by indecision, should not be taken lightly because of the significant influence of these communities on society both today and in the future.

### **Pay Attention to the Original Vision as Well as the Existing Culture and Vision of the Church**

One of the significant and surprising themes from this research is that every church in the study could trace its university orientation to its founding vision. None of them described a transformation from being a church for which the university was not a key aspect of its vision to one that had adopted that community as a key focus. One interviewee described the struggle of a church where he served previously that wanted to become more university-oriented yet it was not successful in doing so. Many spoke of

multiple factors that threatened to pull their churches away from the university-oriented vision. These interviews suggest that it is far easier to lose the university orientation than it is to gain it. Accordingly, an existing church that considers adopting a university-oriented vision would be wise to take seriously its original vision and how this potential new vision might relate to it.

Churches would also be wise to pay attention to the existing culture and vision of the church. Much will likely have changed since the early days of a church, and the original vision may have shifted significantly. Nevertheless, these interviews suggest that key aspects of that original vision may still be embedded in the existing culture of the church. As such, the church should look at the current culture and vision, both explicit and implicit, to see how these things relate to the university community.

For a church that does not have a current or historic vision and culture that are closely associated with a university community, it may be wiser and more realistic to be a missionary church that supports others in reaching the university community. At the same time, such a church should identify a different target community that more closely fits its own identity. Being a missionary church that seeks to influence the university community by supporting others in that task could certainly include the vision of having one's own internal university-oriented ministry, such as a ministry to college students or to faculty and staff as well. Yet these ministries would be a part of the overall ministry of the church rather than defining characteristics of its overall vision.

### **Adjustments to the Definition of University-Oriented Churches**

The starting definition in this study of university-oriented churches was this: "A university-oriented church is a multi-generational congregation that chooses to be close

to a major college or university, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

This section takes this definition one phrase at a time to highlight key lessons learned from these interviews. In this process, a few changes to the definition will be described.

The first part of the definition emphasizes the generational inclusiveness of the congregation: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation.* The original definition described a university-oriented church as being multi-generational. The idea was to differentiate a university-oriented church from a student church, that is, a niche church focused on students in which predominantly students attend and reaching students is a central purpose of the church. In contrast, *intergenerational* is a significant addition in that the vision of such a church is one that intentionally blurs the boundaries between the generations as well as the different obvious categories of people, such as students, staff, faculty, graduates, and those not formally connected with the school. A *multi-generational* church might include ministries specifically for each of these groups yet it can do so in a way that leaves them as separate groups. In contrast, the vision depicted in this study is one in which such differences between people are minimized, while still respecting the culture that dominates the lives of people in this setting.

It should be noted that participants differed significantly in their beliefs about the merits of endeavoring to be intergenerational. One participant explicitly and strongly argued that it might be a nice idea in the abstract but impractical in reality. In particular, he argued that older people, such as faculty, might like being in a church with a lot of students in it, but students would not like being in a church with a lot of faculty in it.



Another participant described the challenge of seeking to be an intergenerational church in the context of several niche churches. Young people, he observed, were naturally more attracted to the niche community. On the other hand, several participants spoke highly of the intergenerational vision. The point of the church, they argued, was to foster interaction between categories of people. In this way, the local church can and must do what parachurch ministries and niche churches cannot, and that is to promote and celebrate the unity of the body of Christ in the midst of the great diversity of that body.

Accordingly, in pursuing the vision of an intergenerational church, challenges will inevitably come. Yet these challenges are inherent in the life of being a follower of Christ. To put it in intentionally strong terms, it is a life of seeking to make peace with one's enemies, of blessing those who curse, of respecting harsh authorities, of being compassionate with those under your authority, and of loving those who are quite different from oneself. Apart from the working of the Holy Spirit, there is much to argue against the effectiveness of intergenerational ministry. Yet the calling of the church is to reflect the glory of God rather than to be the best that can be expected from people, so pursuing the vision of an intergenerational church is a high calling that is dependent upon the working of God in the midst of His people.

The definition then highlights that being a university-oriented church is a choice: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation **that chooses**.* In other words, it is possible, for example, to be close to a university campus, and even to have many students from that campus who are an active part of the church, and yet for the church not to be university-oriented. Being a university-oriented church is the result of intentional and ongoing choices by a congregation. And for those choosing to move in

this direction, as described by participants, it is a long term process rather than a quick change or a once-for-all decision.

The next part of the definition identifies the focus population for the congregation: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community.* The most basic description of what it means to be a missional church is that the church moves closer to its target community and it engages that community with the Gospel. So for a university-oriented missional church, the first part of the definition is that it chooses to be close to the university community. The point is not so much to be close to the university itself but rather to be close to the community that is dominated by that university. As such, the definition of a university-oriented church has been expanded to include the word *community* rather than just being close to the *university* because the focus of such a church will be on the community rather than on something identified by the formal boundaries of that institution. Sometimes this distinction is less obvious, such as in a *college town* where a single school is the most dominant influence in that community. At other times, however, the distinction is more significant, such as in bigger cities where multiple universities form a larger academic community that then influences a broader community that has many other influences. In either setting, the university-oriented church chooses to be close to the community that is dominated by the university.

As described earlier, God sent His Son *into* the world to save the world. He took up His dwelling among the people of the world. He became like us. What He did is the ideal model of what it means to move closer to the community one intends to reach. Like the Son of God, missional churches choose to be close to their target communities. And

as is seen in the model demonstrated by the Son of God, such closeness is expressed in multiple ways.

The succeeding parts of the definition identify the types of *closeness* that the church pursues: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community, including physically.*

The most basic sense of being close to a university community is physical proximity. While it is true that we live a world in which virtual presence is increasingly accepted, the majority of the respondents in this study continued to be convinced of the significance of physical closeness. In fact, they pointed to the choice to keep the church very close geographically to the university community as one of the most important decisions they had made and continued to make.

What *close to* means is certainly affected by the local community. For some of the respondents, *close to* meant walking distance because students did not use cars or public transportation. For others, *close to* meant a 15-minute ride on public transportation from several major universities. Yet even the church that described this public transportation aspect of closeness chose to locate its church where it did because it would be both symbolically and physically situated at the center of the culture it sought to influence.

While it is easy to assume that the primary beneficiaries of this physical closeness would be the students who have limited transportation options, one respondent highlighted the effect that such closeness had on the congregation itself as well as its leadership. When the people of the church were physically close to the academic community, he argued, they were naturally affected by those issues and concerns that regularly confronted that community. Those issues would be the ones that, on at least a

weekly basis, would spur their thinking and challenge their understanding of the world around them. While “out of sight is out of mind” might be an overstatement, it also is not without its significance. People in this church that was physically located near the university campus were regularly prompted to think about the issues, concerns, and ideas of the people within that community. It is harder to ignore what you see on a weekly or daily basis than to ignore what you only hear about. To take an example from ministry among the poor, it is easier to forget that there are people living on the streets when you never encounter any. But if each week when one goes to church one has to walk past homeless people on the way from the car to the sanctuary, the challenges of those people will likely be more active in one’s thinking. Of course it is certainly possible and even common to come to ignore what one encounters regularly, so being close physically is not a guarantee of sensitivity. Yet regularly entering into a physical space that represents the people one seeks to reach can be a powerful tool to prevent the pull toward other issues from drowning the vision of a missional church.

The next two dimensions of closeness are very similar: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community, including physically, socially, culturally.* Though they are similar, the difference is important in that being close socially involves relating to specific people and their particular needs and issues, while being close culturally involves understanding people’s general ways of thinking, communicating, and interacting. Interviewees illustrated the social closeness as they described knowing the needs of people in this community and how their churches sought to be with these people in their needs and to help meet them. Some churches talked about helping students move into

their dorms. Other respondents described how people in their church learned of concerns that were shared by people in the academic community as well as in the church, concerns such as social justice, disaster relief, and even childcare. These people in the church then sought to work together with people in that community to address those concerns. Others described understanding the personality and concerns of people in the university community by getting to know them personally.

Another aspect of social closeness is being open to the contributions of people from this community. One respondent described the *reverse flow* of blessing from those within the university community to the church. When the church is socially close to the university community, it has the opportunity to listen well both to the concerns and to the strengths of those in that community. It encourages those individuals to speak from their own experiences and perspectives as academics, as questioners, and as learners, as well as individuals with personal concerns and dreams.

Jesus demonstrated this social closeness by eating with those whom the religious leaders and even general society rejected, and by letting them serve Him. Jesus heard and understood the concerns of these people, was aware of their personal needs, and is described often as helping to meet those needs. University-oriented churches similarly choose to be close to people in the university community on this social level.

One participant in this study suggested adding *racially* as one of the dimensions in which the church chooses to move closer to the university community. Rather than add a dimension, however, this issue seems to fit naturally within social closeness. The church chooses to value people for who they are, listening to their concerns and perspectives, and inviting them to be equal members in the church. If one characteristic

of a particular university community is a different distribution of race and ethnicity, the church ought to move closer to the people of those groups, to welcome them, to love them, and to invite them into the church community, making adjustments as needed in order to demonstrate their love for all of the people in that community.

While social closeness relates to the specifics of particular people, cultural closeness relates to the broader patterns of thinking and interacting of that community. The types of questions and issues that are of concern to many in the community, and the strategies for communicating, for disagreeing, and for agreeing, are all parts of the local culture of the university community. A university-oriented church seeks to understand and speak from within this culture.

As is clear from this study, there is no single *university culture*. The eleven academic communities included here were significantly different from each other even as they also shared some important characteristics. Churches that seek to be university-oriented must commit themselves to get to know the local culture and move closer to it. In fact, as one respondent described, churches must recognize the diversity even within a particular university community.

While there is a great deal of variation among these schools, it may be helpful to identify some characteristics that were highlighted by many respondents as they described the modes of thinking, communicating, and living in these university communities. Important themes included the following:

- It seeks intellectual integrity. This characteristic was mentioned more often and more forcefully in the *heavily academic* communities, yet it was mentioned by others as well. This value is opposed to anything that promotes or enforces a

particular idea through pressure, authority, tradition, or practicality. As such, having to adhere to predetermined dogma or to proclaim devotion to a particular political party or organization are likely to be distasteful to people in such a community.

- It is willing to engage controversial, unpopular, and challenging ideas. Again, this characteristic came out more strongly in the *heavily academic* communities. This culture is opposed to denial of unwanted evidence or to suppression of unwanted views. As such, academic freedom, that is, the freedom to pursue that which seems irreverent, unorthodox, or politically incorrect, is highly valued.
- It seeks to make a difference in the real world, not just in the world of the classroom or research lab or worship service. Several respondents described the desire in this community, particularly by students, to do something about poverty, injustice, suffering, and conflict. Learning and talking are good but not sufficient to fulfill the vision of making a difference.

Of course, the academic culture cannot be boiled down to three values, and certainly academics would resist such a simplification even if it were accurate.

Furthermore, even these values are neither universally honored nor enacted. Respondents described many variations between institutions as well as within particular institutions. Nevertheless, these themes were highlighted by respondents and are likely to be present in many academic settings.

The implications of identifying the culture of the local community are obviously significant. As noted by many respondents, a key decision that this culture affects is the



choice of senior pastor. If the senior pastor does not have credibility with the target community, particularly in preaching, the church is unlikely to be effective in its outreach efforts.

As was mentioned above in the section on being close socially to the university community, virtual presence is not the same as physical presence. That being said, certainly the world has changed tremendously because of technology-based communication. A few respondents highlighted the importance for university-oriented churches of having a significant presence in the world of social media. Such churches must take seriously the ways in which the means of communicating and interacting are changing because of the presence of technology. University-oriented churches need to understand and to speak from within the world of social media rather than just offering a critique of it from the outside.

The definition then adds a final dimension of closeness: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually.* Being close to a university community spiritually means approaching the community with humility rather than pride. Certainly it does not mean changing the church's theology so as to be more like or more acceptable to the university. Instead, a university-oriented church recognizes that before God it, like the community around it, is fallen, and by nature it was an object of God's wrath. It views the world that is outside of Christ with great compassion and longing for them to be saved<sup>1</sup>, rather than with pride, contempt,

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 9:3.

and antagonism<sup>2</sup>. As described by one respondent, the church must guard against having an *us and them* model of thinking.

A university-oriented church would also do well to recognize the image of God in all people as well as the reality and the value of common grace. Even though secular universities have chosen to distance themselves from, or even to oppose, the truth of the Gospel, they also by God's grace have much to offer to the church and the world. A church that will recognize and even celebrate this goodness in love will certainly be more likely to be welcomed into that community. It will also be able to be a beneficiary of God's common grace demonstrated through the knowledge, expertise, and good will of that community.

A university-oriented church must also be comfortable with admitting complexity and with engaging challenging questions within its own spirituality. Rather than presenting a theology that presumes that it has final answers to all meaningful questions and that resists the difficulty of rectifying truth with truth and with lived experience, such a church does well to be open and honest about its uncertainties and about troublesome issues. A church that actually finds it exciting to enter into conversation about challenging ideas and experiences will likely be more welcomed in a university community, much as one respondent described the necessary qualities of a senior pastor for that setting. It will also grow as it wrestles through such challenging issues.

The definition concludes with what a university-oriented church does with its closeness: *A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, **and actively engages that community with the***

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<sup>2</sup> See Ephesians 2:1-3.

*Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Being a university-oriented church requires two things: being close to the university community, and engaging that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To do the former without the latter is to fail to help. An apparent pattern is that some liberal churches have a tendency to be close to the university community, yet they fail to engage that community with the Gospel. In contrast, it seems that some conservative churches have a tendency to be strong in their commitment to the Gospel while failing to be close enough to the university community to engage that community with that good news. In short, being close and engaging with the Gospel are both essential if a church is to be effective in bringing salvation to this community.

Engaging the university community with the Gospel includes both actions and words. Respondents mentioned many aspects of serving people through the Gospel, that is, of living out the love and compassion of God for people in need, whether physically, socially, personally, or spiritually. Sometimes this service was described as being separate from a verbal expression of the Gospel, and sometimes it was presented as being a means of creating opportunity for that verbal expression of hope. A university-oriented church will get to know the people of the university community well enough that it knows their needs, and then it will use its resources to meet those needs, particularly the deepest need of reconciliation with God, out of the power of the Gospel.

University-oriented churches will also seek to communicate the truth of the Gospel. Respondents repeatedly expressed the conviction that the Bible communicates the necessary and sufficient content of the means of salvation. They also spoke of their commitment to communicate this Gospel in a way that was consistent with the many good values in the university setting, not the least of which is the emphasis on intellectual

integrity. Particularly in the more heavily academic settings, respondents described the values of careful thinking and of taking seriously the challenges of life in the world today. The Gospel and everyday experience should have a deep connection that the church can both articulate and enact.

That being said, the churches generally expressed dissatisfaction with how their own churches engaged the community with the Gospel. Their tendency, they said, was to leave that essential action to the individuals within the church. Preaching that is intentionally inclusive of non-Christians from the university community was the most prominent strategy mentioned. Most also mentioned equipping individuals for evangelistic ministry, although again many described their churches' need to grow in this area. Others mentioned evangelistic small group ministries in which groups were intentionally designed to draw in non-Christians from that community. It seems clear that additional work, experimentation, and creativity are needed in this area if engaging this community with the message of the Gospel is going to be accomplished broadly and effectively.

### **Final Definition**

Based on the interactions with the participants, the original definition of a university-oriented church has been changed slightly as described above. The final form is this: "A university-oriented church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a major college or university community, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

## **Implications for Non-University-Oriented Churches**

Even though the focus of this study was on university-oriented churches, much of what has been learned is not actually specific to the university community. In particular, whether a church identifies a university community as its target community or not, it is the task of a local church to identify its target community and to identify its ministry model for reaching that group. In this sense, *university-oriented* can be removed from this definition and be replaced with whatever community is selected by the church.

Accordingly, a more general *inclusive missional church* definition would be, “An inclusive missional church is an intergenerational congregation that chooses to be close to a selected local community, including physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually, and actively engages that community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

As with being *university-oriented*, the choice of one’s target community should not be taken lightly. Indeed, rightly enacted this choice should affect every aspect of church life. Furthermore, no church should be without such a vision for bringing the Gospel to a local community. If it is without such a vision, it will end up serving only itself. And a church that serves only itself will ultimately not even do that well, for it will cease to be like God.

## **Next Steps for Research and Ministry**

As has been argued, secular universities in the United States are, humanly speaking, incredibly influential institutions. As such, it was surprising how little has been published specifically addressing how best to live out the vision of a university-oriented church. It was also surprising how few university-oriented churches could be identified for inclusion in this study. Niche ministries have been a relative strength in reaching out

to these communities, particularly among students. And in at least some locations, niche churches represent a growing approach to bringing the Gospel to people in the academic community. Yet it seems obvious that university-oriented churches are a critical strategy for living out God's vision of using the Church to bring salvation to the world.

Further work is therefore needed to bring greater understanding to both the vision and the implementation of university-oriented churches. One particular need is to identify the broad categories of university communities (e.g., highly academic schools, professional schools, college towns, commuter campuses) and what the implications of the cultures of these communities are for church ministry. Of particular interest to this researcher is the category of *highly academic institutions* because of the paucity of attention given by the church to these schools, the relative scarcity of evangelical faculty within them, and the dominant influence they have on our country and on other countries of the world.

Another significant endeavor based upon this research would be for university-oriented churches that focus on communities with similar characteristics to create means for supporting and encouraging each other, just as there are networks for college student ministries. Much is being learned by people engaged in ministry at particular churches, both in terms of what works and in terms of what does not, and the wise will seek to learn from others' experiences. As such, some sort of network that fosters such sharing could be a tremendous resource to many.

### **Concluding Personal Observations**

Personally I have found this study to be very invigorating. I actually attended First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley while doing graduate work at the University of

California, Berkeley. That church was one included in this study and it is the one church that was specifically named in this study because of its history in that city during the Free Speech Movement. As I think back to my involvement in First Pres, I realize that it was there that my vision of a university-oriented church was largely formed. It is my prayer that this study will lead others to embrace this vision of university-oriented churches, both in the recasting of the vision of existing churches where possible and appropriate, and in the planting of new churches where it is not. I am very thankful for the opportunity to interact with the leaders in these churches and pray that, in some way, I might be able to serve the Church in its ministry to university communities.



## APPENDIX:

### UNIVERSITY-ORIENTED CHURCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Note:** These questions are being provided to you before the interview in order to help you prepare for the interview itself if you so choose. You are welcome to write out answers ahead of time or to state them verbally in the interview.

#### 1. Reaction to the definition

What is your reaction to the attached definition of a university oriented church?  
Would you change it in any way?

#### 2. Target community

Describe the primary target population for this church.

- College students connected with the college/university community
- All of the people connected with the college/university community
- The community in which the college/university is located
- Other

#### 3. Self assessment of university orientation

Would you consider your church a university-oriented church?

- Definitely. If so, in what ways is it?
- Somewhat. If so, in what ways is it and it what was is it not?
- No. If not, why not?

#### 4. Church congregation

Describe the church congregation. In particular:

- Approximately how many people...  
...are there overall? \_\_\_\_\_  
...are college or university students? \_\_\_\_\_  
...are college or university faculty or staff? \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the blend between "town" (non-academic people) and "gown" (academic people)?
  - Almost all "gown"
  - Mostly "gown"

- 3) Evenly split
- 4) Mostly "town"
- 5) Almost all "town"

c. Approximately what fraction of the members and active attendees are ...

55+: \_\_\_\_\_ %  
 35-54: \_\_\_\_\_ %  
 18-34: \_\_\_\_\_ %  
 0-17: \_\_\_\_\_ %

#### **5. The university community**

How would you describe the university community that is the focus of your church? In particular:

- a. How many colleges or universities are there in your community?
  - 1) There is one college or university
  - 2) There is a most dominant school with other educational institutions
  - 3) There are many schools of varying dominance
  - 4) Other
- b. How dominant is the university community in your area?
  - 1) The university community is clearly the most dominant factor
  - 2) The university community is one of the most dominant factors
  - 3) The university community is just a part of the overall mix
  - 4) Other
- c. How would you describe the culture of the university community? (e.g., heavily academic, practical/professional, urban, suburban, rural, intercultural, ...)

#### **6. Official stance toward the university community**

What official church policies or actions demonstrate your church's orientation toward the university community (or not)? (e.g., mission statement, line items of budget, staff positions)

#### **7. Making the connections with the university community**

- a. How does your church make connections with people in the university community?

- b. Are there specific actions that you take that relate to the multiple dimensions listed in the attached definition (i.e., physical, social, cultural, spiritual)? If so, what are they?

**8. Actively engaging the university community with the Gospel**

- a. How does your church actively engage the university community with the Gospel?

- b. In what ways do the **people of the church do this?**

- c. In what ways do you **equip the people of your church** to do this?

- d. In what ways does **the church body as a whole do this?**

**9. Turning points of the university-orientation of this church**

- a. When the church was **initially formed**, what was target age group?

- 1) It was **student oriented**
- 2) It was **multi-generational**
- 3) Other

- b. When the church was **initially formed**, what was its stance toward the university community?

- 1) Its **specific vision** was for the university community
- 2) It was **interested** in reaching the university community
- 3) The university community was **not a part** of its vision
- 4) Other

- c. **Today**, what is the church's stance toward the university community?

- 1) Its **specific vision** is for the university community

- 2) It is **interested** in reaching the university community as one part of its vision
- 3) The university community is **not a part** of its vision
- 4) The church is **trying to decide** what place the university community has in its vision
- 5) Other

d. Over the **history of the church**, the church's stance toward the university community has...

- 1) remained the same
- 2) increased
- 3) decreased
- 4) gone up and down
- 5) other

e. What was (were) the source (sources) of the university-oriented vision for this church?

f. To what degree is the church a church "of" the university community in addition to being a church "to" the university community? In other words, to what degree (and in what ways) do people from that community actively contribute to the overall life of the church in addition to being served by the church?

g. What are the **major decisions or actions** in the history of the church that have made it either more or less effective in reaching the university community? For example, when the church selected a location, hired pastoral staff, established its vision, etc., how did an orientation toward the university-community fit into that decision? What impact did those decisions or actions have on the church's effectiveness in reaching out to the university community?

h. Were there **events** that had a significant impact on the church's vision for the university community? If so, what were they and what impact did they have?

**10. Advice**

What advice would you give to a church (either new or existing) that wanted to become more university-oriented?

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## VITA

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